

CHAPTER 4: Adjectives and Adverbs

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will investigate two word classes, adjectives and adverbs. Both are used as modifiers and both can function as predicators:

- (4.1-1) Clem saw the fat boy. [Adjective as modifier]
 Clem is fat. [Adjective as predicator]
 Alphonse speaks tomorrow. [Adverb as modifier]
 The appointment is tomorrow. [Adverb as predicator]

Adjectives and especially adverbs are complex classes and there is some debate as to exactly what should be included within them. As a matter of convenience we will, on the whole, take a traditional view of the membership of these classes.

4.2 Adjectivals, Adjectives, and Compounds

The term 'adjectival' is a function label, the term 'adjective' is the name of a word class. Not all adjectivals are adjectives, and not all adjectives are adjectivals.

'Adjectival' is the label assigned to any syntactic constituent, regardless of form, that modifies a noun or pronoun. As illustrated in Section 1.6, adjectivals are a diverse set syntactically. Participles, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases, as well as adjectives, function as adjectivals.

'Adjective' is the label given to a word whose major function is the modification of nouns and which denotes qualities or attributes. While this is not a totally satisfactory characterization of adjectives, it will suffice for our limited purposes.

The word class membership of adjectivals is not always easy to determine, especially given the characteristic fluidity of English word classes. For example, in

- (4.2-1) the above example

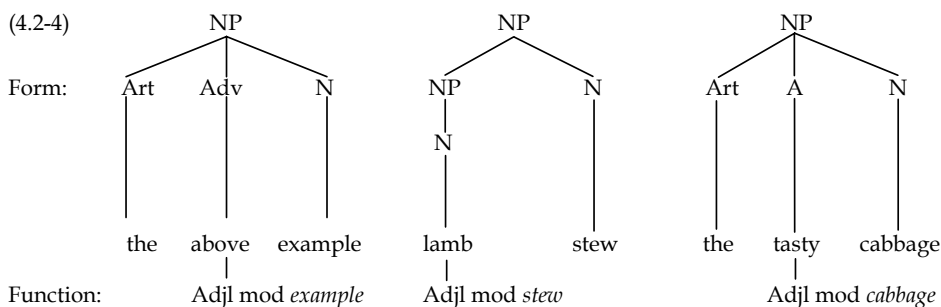
above is sometimes analyzed as an adverb, sometimes as an adjective. Similarly, in

- (4.2-2) lamb stew

lamb is variously considered a noun or an adjective. We will take the view here that words in such cases should be analyzed according to the class with which they are typically associated. So, diagrams for the sentences above and

- (4.2-3) the tasty cabbage

which has an adjective functioning as an adjectival, are:



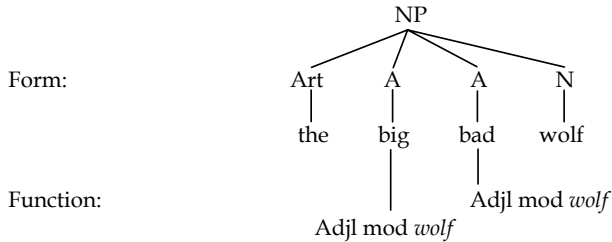
Some words should probably be analyzed as belonging sometimes to one class, sometimes to another. For instance, *criminal* seems to be a noun in *the criminals were sentenced to 15 years*, but an adjective in *the criminal element prevailed*. The words *noble*, *black*, *classic*, *juvenile*, and many others be-

have similarly. All these words were historically adjectives but came to behave as nouns too. They can all be pluralized and can appear in the associative case.

- (4.2-5) There were four blacks and three whites in that combo.
 This noble's estates were confiscated during the revolution.
 Five juveniles were seen entering the store at 5th and Main.
 Rodney read the classics at the University of Lackawanna.

More than one adjectival can, of course, modify a noun. For example, two adjectives modify a noun in

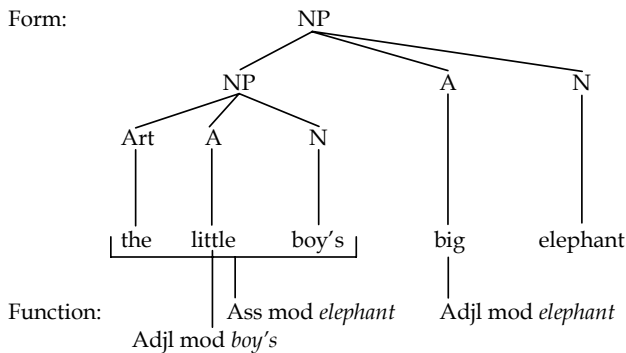
- (4.2-6) the big bad wolf



In this example *big* and *bad* modify *wolf* in strictly parallel fashion: the wolf is big and the wolf is bad. We do not understand *big bad wolf* such that *big* modifies *bad wolf* – it only modifies *wolf*, just as *bad* does.

It is entirely possible, however, for modifiers with a noun phrase to be arranged hierarchically, i.e. for one modifier to modify another. We've encountered instances of this sort with associative constructions:

- (4.2-7) the little boy's big elephant

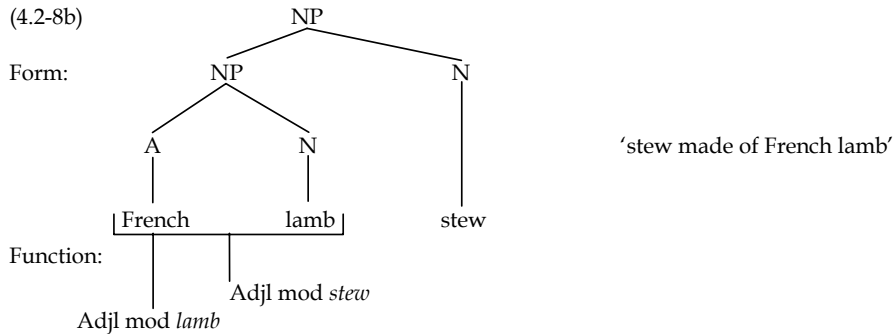
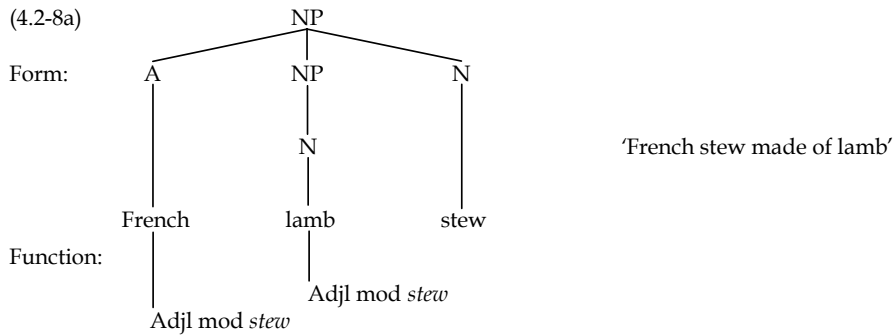


In this example, *little* modifies *boy's*, not *elephant*, and is thus placed inside the phrase of which *boy's* is the head. *Elephant*, in turn, is modified by *big* and the whole NP *the little boy's*: each of these constituents is placed inside *elephant's* NP.

Now consider the example:

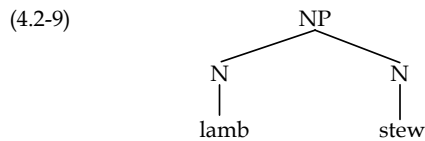
- (4.2-8) French lamb stew

This NP has two distinct interpretations. It can mean either 'a French stew made of lamb' or 'a stew made of French lamb,' i.e. *French* can be taken to modify either *stew* or *lamb*. The two interpretations have different internal structures:



As noted above, the difference between the two structures hinges on what it is *French* modifies: in (4.2-8a) *French* modifies *stew* – the stew is both French and made of lamb. In (4.2-8b), *French* modifies *lamb*, and *French lamb* modifies *stew*. The diagrams are simply a way of mapping these internal structural relations.

Notice that in each of the diagrams above *lamb*, as a noun, has its own NP. This follows from the general principle noted in Chapters 1 and 2 that each noun will always have its own NP. [Noun components of compounds are an exception – see below this section.] There are two reasons why nouns functioning as adjectivals must have their own NPs. First, without a separate NP for *lamb*, the diagram

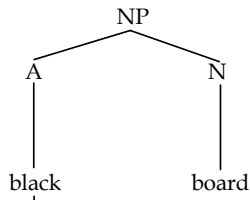


would amount to a claim that this NP has two heads, *lamb* and *stew*, whereas in fact there is just one – *stew* – with *lamb* acting as a modifier of *stew*. The two nouns here have an asymmetrical relationship and cannot be interpreted as being structurally on a par. Second, without a separate NP for *lamb*, there would be no way to distinguish structurally the different meanings diagrammed in (4.2-8a) and (4.2-8b), i.e. to show within a form diagram the different ways that *French* can associate with *lamb* and *stew*.

Incidentally, the structural relation between adjective and noun illustrated by (4.2-8b) provides an argument for considering *lamb* in *lamb stew* to be a noun and not an adjective. The expression *drunken lamb stew* – interpreted as meaning 'a stew from drunken lambs' – has the adjective

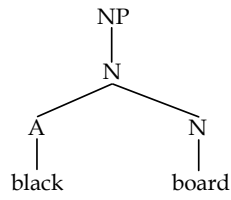
black bóard
[modification]

Form:



Function: Adj1 mod board

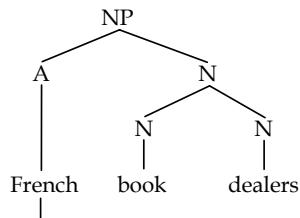
bláckboard
[compound]



Like other nouns, compounds can be modified:

(4.2-14) French bóok dealers

Form:

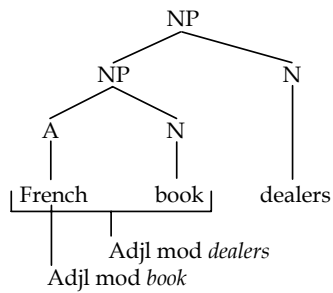


Function: Adj1 mod bóok dealers

This noun phrase refers to bóok dealers who are French. These same three words can also combine to form *French book déalers*, i.e. dealers of French books. This will be diagrammed as:

(4.2-15)

Form:

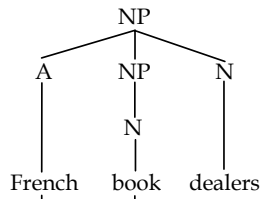


Function: Adj1 mod book
Adj1 mod dealers

Notice that *French book déalers* **cannot** be diagrammed as

(4.2-16)

Form:

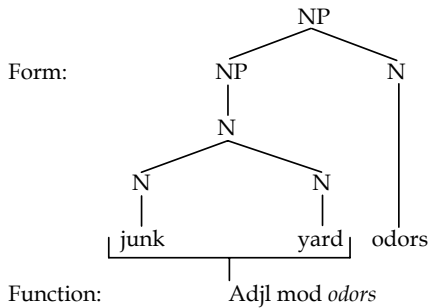


Function: Adj1 mod dealers
Adj1 mod dealers

because this would claim that *French* modifies *dealers* [i.e. the dealers would have to be French], when in fact it modifies *book* [i.e. the books are French].

Compounds can also serve as modifiers. In

(4.2-17) junk yard odors



the compound *junk yard* modifies the noun *odors*.

The semantic difference between modification relationships and compounds is a bit complicated and cannot be discussed here in detail. However, some differences between these constructions can be illustrated by comparing the following:

(4.2-18) *lady killer* [Compound: 'a man given to amorous conquests of women']
lady killer [Modification relationship: 'a killer who is a woman']

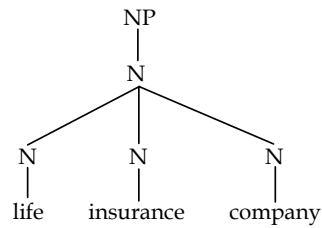
The modification relationship *lady killer* requires an interpretation where the referent is both a killer and a lady, i.e. both the head and the modifier individually express characteristics of the referent. The function of the modifier is, as always, to narrow down the range of referents that the head can refer to: lady killers are a subset of killers.

But in the compound *lady killer* the relationship between *lady* and *killer*, and indeed the sense of the whole construction, is not literal but rather idiomatic, and while such idiomaticity is not criterial for compounds, it is nonetheless frequently encountered with them. Recall the difference between *black board* and *blackboard*, where the latter, a compound, need not actually be black — whereas the former must — and need not even be a board, as in electronic blackboard.

In English, compounds are sometimes written as single words [e.g. *blackboard*, *doghhouse*, *lighthouse*] and sometimes as two words [*book dealers*, *lamb chop*, *junkyard*]. This difference is often said to be related to the frequency of the compound, i.e. more frequently uttered compounds are written as one word. But the matter is really much more arbitrary than this — lighthouses aren't more frequently encountered or discussed than lamb chops or junk yards. One generalization does hold, though: compounds consisting of polysyllabic words are never written as single words [e.g. *Commerce Secretary*, *Treasury Department*, and the like].

German, a close relative of English, has virtually the same compounding patterns that English does, and a much more consistent orthographic convention for dealing with them. Compounds in German are always written as single words. For instance, the English compound *church tower* has a German counterpart *Kirchturm*, consisting of *kirche* 'church', and *Turm* 'tower' like its English translation. Unlike English, German orthography treats even compounds of polysyllabic words as single orthographic units. These can look quite formidable, but linguistically speaking they are not different from their English counterparts; they differ only in orthography. For example, the English compound *life insurance company* [note the initial stress] translates into German as *Lebensversicherungsgesellschaft* [*Leben* 'life', *Versicherung* 'insurance', *Gesellschaft* 'company']. Linguistically speaking, they represent the same construction, namely they are both compounds, but orthographic traditions make them look different. *Life insurance company* is diagrammed as:

(4.2-17)



One last word about compounds: compounds need to be distinguished from 'fixed expressions'. Fixed expressions are sequences of words that have come to be used as titles, place names and so on. Like compounds, fixed expressions may involve special meanings, i.e. meanings that are not a product of the meanings of their component parts. For our purposes, fixed expressions differ from compounds in their stress placement: whereas compound nouns are always stressed on the first syllable, fixed expressions have the ordinary attributive stress, i.e. they have stress on the head of the NP, which is typically the last element.

(4.2-17)	<u>Compounds</u>	<u>Fixed expressions</u>
	Réd Sox	Red Séa
	Réd Deer (Alberta)	Red Cróss
	réd eye	red méat
	White House	White Séa
	Chrýsler Building	Pacific Ócean
	Séa Islands	Long Ísland

4.3 Adjectives

4.3.1 Syntactic Function of Adjectives

We have already considered two functions of adjectives, viz. their role as modifiers of nouns and their role as predicators. When an adjective modifies a noun it is said to have ATTRIBUTIVE function; as a predicator it has PREDICATIVE function.

Adjective modifiers of nouns can either be preposed or postposed (Section 2.1). The great majority of adjectives in English normally occur in preposed position, but there are instances of postposed adjectives. Postposed adjectives occur in some legal or political collocations.

- (4.3-1) attorney general
 postmaster general
 notary public
 heir apparent
 court martial

Some adjectives have a different sense in preposed and postposed position:

- (4.3-2) the City of Tonawanda proper 'as strictly defined'
 the proper City of Tonawanda 'decorous, displaying exaggerated propriety'

Following pronouns, however, all adjectives are postposed:

- | (4.2-3) | <u>Indefinite pronouns</u> | <u>Associative pronouns</u> |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | someone <u>silly</u> | my <u>own</u> [room] |
| | *a <u>silly</u> someone | * <u>own</u> my room |

Their use, however, is best regarded as a predicative, not attributive, use, the adjective resulting from a reduction of a relative clause:

(4.3.2) Kinds of Modification

There are two sorts of relations that an adjective can have with a noun, whether the adjective has an attributive or predicative function. We will refer to these as REFERENCE MODIFICATION and REFERENT MODIFICATION. In order to understand the difference between these, it is necessary first to examine the semantics of a class of nouns. Common nouns, for example, those referring to human beings such as *friend*, *soldier*, *mother*, *president*, and so on, refer both to roles played by people and to people themselves. So, *the soldier* can refer either to an individual acting in the role of a soldier or to a person who happens to be a soldier. The difference between the two is brought out when we modify the noun. Consider, for example,

(4.3-13) the good soldier

This is ambiguous between the two interpretations of *soldier*. In one interpretation, *good* modifies the role of being a soldier — i.e. the individual is good as a soldier, but he may otherwise not be a good person. The other interpretation has *good* modify the individual, not the role: The individual is claimed to be both a good person and a soldier, but he may not be good as a soldier. Where adjectives like *good* modify the role a noun expresses, we refer to it as reference modification. Where adjectives modify the individual underlying the role, we refer to it as referent modification. As a further example, consider:

(4.3-14) my old friend

When *old* modifies the reference indicated by *friend*, it modifies the role. So in this interpretation, the individual could be a longtime friend [old as a friend] but might be a young person. If *old* modifies the referent underlying *friend*, it is the individual who is stated to be old. These interpretations are summarized below:

(4.3-15)	<u>Reference modification</u>	<u>Referent modification</u>
the good soldier	[good at being a soldier]	[a good person who is also a soldier]
my old friend	[a longtime friend, old as a friend]	[an old person who is also my friend]

Attributive adjectives are potentially ambiguous between the two interpretations where the sense of the adjective and the noun permit. Some attributive adjectives, however, only allow a reference modification interpretation.

(4.3-16) a mere child
a crack salesman
an utter fool

These adjectives only modify reference [or roles], not individuals: it is not the person underlying the salesman who is 'crack', but rather he is 'crack' in his role as a salesman. Adjectives with predicative function only allow a referent modification interpretation. So in

(4.3-17) the soldier is good
my friend is old

only the referent modification emerges. Notice that the adjectives that admit only a reference modification interpretation do not occur with predicative function:

(4.3-18) *the child is mere
*the salesman is crack
*the fool is utter

Adjective-noun compounds seem to admit only reference modification interpretations. For example, the compound English teacher [note the initial, compound stress] has reference modification

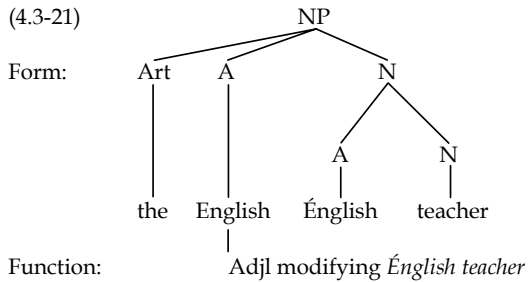
[English modifies the role as teacher and so the phrase refers to a teacher of English], but the attributive adjective in *English teacher* [note the stress on the head noun *teacher*] modifies the individual underlying the role and proclaims him or her to be of English nationality. Notice that the predicative use of *English* predictably has referent modification:

(4.3-19) The teacher is English.

Because the two sorts of modification are so different, it is not redundant to say:

(4.3-20) the English *English* teacher.

This is diagrammed as:



There are a number of adjectives which do not normally occur with attributive function, but instead have only predicative function: *asleep*, *ablaze*, *afraid*, *awake*, *afloat*, etc. As we might predict, these adjectives have only referent modification interpretations:

(4.3-22) the child is asleep
 the soldier is afraid

In both examples, it is the individual, not the role, that is being modified.

4.3.3 Paired Adjectives

English adjectives of quality or measure typically occur in pairs of antonyms, such as *good/bad*, *tall/short*, *wide/narrow*, etc. In pairs of this sort, one adjective always functions as the neutral or generic cover term for the common quality expressed in both members of the pair. For example, in asking a question like

(4.3-23) How wide is it?

an appropriate answer could be either:

(4.3-24) very wide
 very narrow

However, in asking a question like

(4.3-25) How narrow is it?

An appropriate answer could be

(4.3-26) very narrow

but not:

(4.3-27) *very wide

Similarly:

(4.3-28)	How old is he?	How young is he?
	Very old	*Very old
	Very young	Very young

How strong is he?	How weak is he?
Very strong	*Very strong
Very weak	Very weak

The neutral term can be used to ask questions when a particular sort of answer is not presupposed. That is, one can frame a question with the adjective *wide* when one doesn't know whether the object in question is wide or narrow. But framing a question with the non-neutral adjective *narrow* presupposes that the object in question is, in fact, narrow. A short list of paired adjectives is provided below:

(4.3-29)	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Non-neutral</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Non-neutral</u>
	old	young, new	wide	narrow
	tall	short	strong	weak
	true	false	smart	dumb, stupid
	good	bad	wise	unwise
	hot	cold	far	near
	high	low	heavy	light
	fast	slow	light	dark

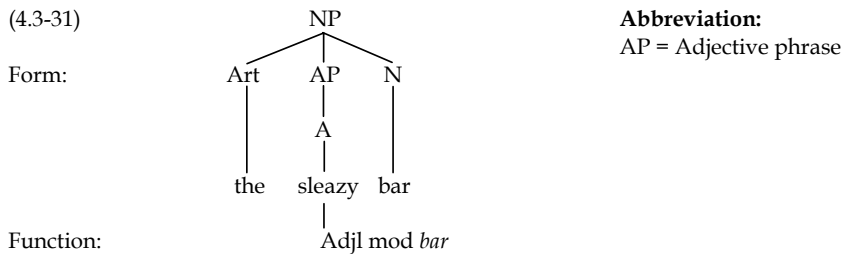
In general, the neutral term refers to the more positive sense, or the one that expresses the quality in greater degree, either impressionistically, or in terms of countable units of measure.

4.3.4 Adjective Phrases

We have already discussed various types of phrases: noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases. Each of these are grammatical units named after the most important word they contain, referred to as the head. One additional sort of phrase is the ADJECTIVE PHRASE. Just as all nouns occur in noun phrases, all adjectives occur in adjective phrases. This means that a noun phrase like

(4.3-30) the sleazy bar

should properly be diagrammed as:

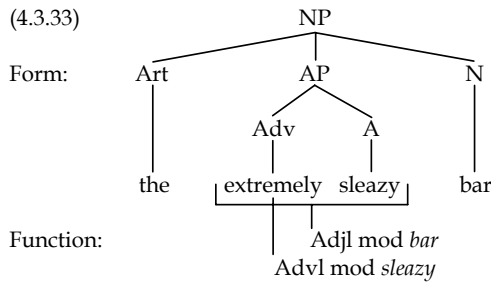


Adjectives are heads of adjective phrases, just as nouns are heads of noun phrases.

Besides the head adjective, adjective phrases may contain other sorts of elements including adverbial modifiers of the head adjective, prepositional phrases, infinitives, and various other syntactic structures. Some illustrations follow:

(4.3-32) an extremely sleazy bar
 Zeke is worried about you
 Hermann is afraid to leave

The first of these can be diagrammed as:



When attributive adjective phrases contain elements other than the head adjectives and preposed adverb modifiers, they must be postposed:

- (4.3-34) a hat too small to wear
 *a too small to wear hat

These complex adjective phrases will be further discussed in later chapters.

4.4 Participles

Participles were briefly discussed in connection with the verb complex in Chapter 3. There it was shown that they figure as obligatory constituents of the verb complex following certain auxiliaries. Participles can also function as modifiers of nouns. This is, perhaps, their most basic function because participles are basically verbal adjectives. They are the form taken by verbs when they modify nouns. So, instead of saying

- (4.4-1) *a swim dog

or the like, we use a participle:

- (4.4-2) a swimming dog

There are two sorts of participles, the ING-participle and the EN-participle. Both sorts of participles can be used attributively:

- (4.4-3) an entertaining movie
 a disgusting spectacle
 an escaped prisoner
 a grown woman

Like other sorts of adjectives, participles are postposed when they are accompanied by syntactic elements other than preposed adverbs. So,

- (4.4-4) the offended man

is acceptable, but

- (4.4-5) *the offended by the policeman man

is not. The participle and the accompanying prepositional phrase must be postposed to make the noun phrase acceptable:

- (4.4-6) the man offended by the policeman