



ASERC 2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMANITY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
ASERC 2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HEALTH, ENGINEERING, ARCHITECTURE AND MATHEMATICS
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THE STRUCTURE OF NOUN PHRASES

Sashka Jovanovska¹, PhD, Marija Talevska², MA, Marija Tashkoska³, MA

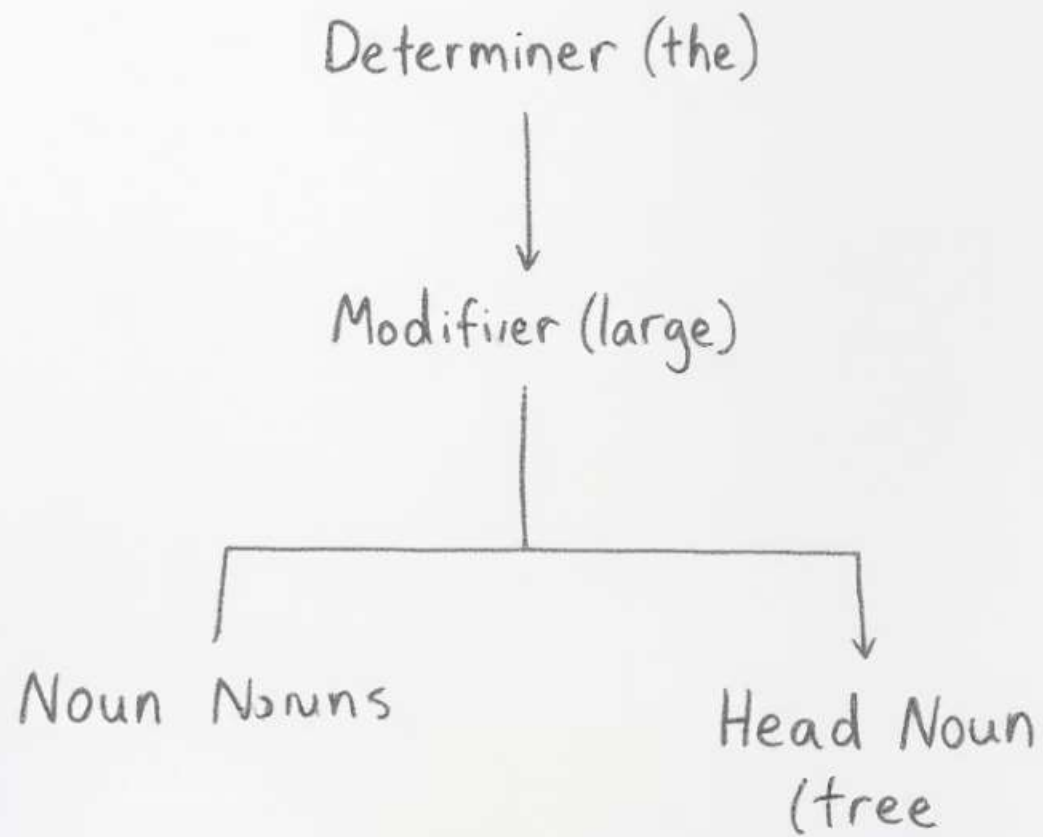
¹ Assistant professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, Republic of North Macedonia, e-mail:

saska.jovanovska@ugd.edu.mk, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3965-8697>

² MA, North Macedonia, e-mail: m.talevska1@yahoo.com, [Items where Author is "Tashkoska, Marija" - UGD Academic Repository](#)

³ MA, North Macedonia, e-mail: marija.tashkoska@gmail.com, [Items where Author is "Talevska, Marija" - UGD Academic Repository](#)





The Structure of Noun Phrases

Noun phrases (NPs) are crucial building blocks of sentence structure. While simple NPs can consist of a single word like a pronoun ("he," "they") or a name ("John," "Paris"), more complex noun phrases often contain additional elements such as determiners, adjectives, and other modifiers.

This presentation explores the internal structure of noun phrases in detail, examining how they are constructed beyond just single words. We'll look at the various components that can appear within NPs and how they relate to each other structurally.



Basic Structure of Noun Phrases

Non-branching NPs

The simplest NPs consist of just a pronoun or name, represented by a non-branching structure. These are the only non-branching NPs in English syntax.

Branching NPs

All other NPs have branching representations with two immediate constituents. In the basic case, these constituents are DET (Determiner) and NOM (Nominal).

The NOM Component

NOM is a level of NP-structure intermediate between the phrasal (NP) level and the lexical (N) level. It can include modifiers of the head noun or consist just of N.



TYPES OF DETERMINERS

1. articles
2. demonstratives
3. quantifiers
4. pronouns
5. possessives
6. adjectives
6. adverbs
9. interjections

1. the
2. this/that/these/those
3. some/any/no/each/every
4. who/whom/whose
6. my/your/his/her/its
8. very/much/few/more/less
11. oh/exclamation
11. interjections

Determiners in Noun Phrases

Articles

The basic determiners are the articles: the definite article (the) and the indefinite article (a/an).

These provide a touchstone for what counts as a determiner.

Other Determiners

Demonstratives (this, that, these, those), certain quantifiers (some, any, no, each, every), and possessives (my, your, its, John's) function as determiners.

Empty Determiners

The determiner position may not always be filled by an actual word. Empty determiners give the NP an indefinite and/or more general interpretation (e.g., "Essays must be word-processed").



Pre-determiners and Quantifying Adjectives



Pre-determiners

Words like all, both, and half resemble determiners but co-occur with and precede them (e.g., "all the men"). Pre-determiners determine an NP and are represented as sister of an NP within NP.



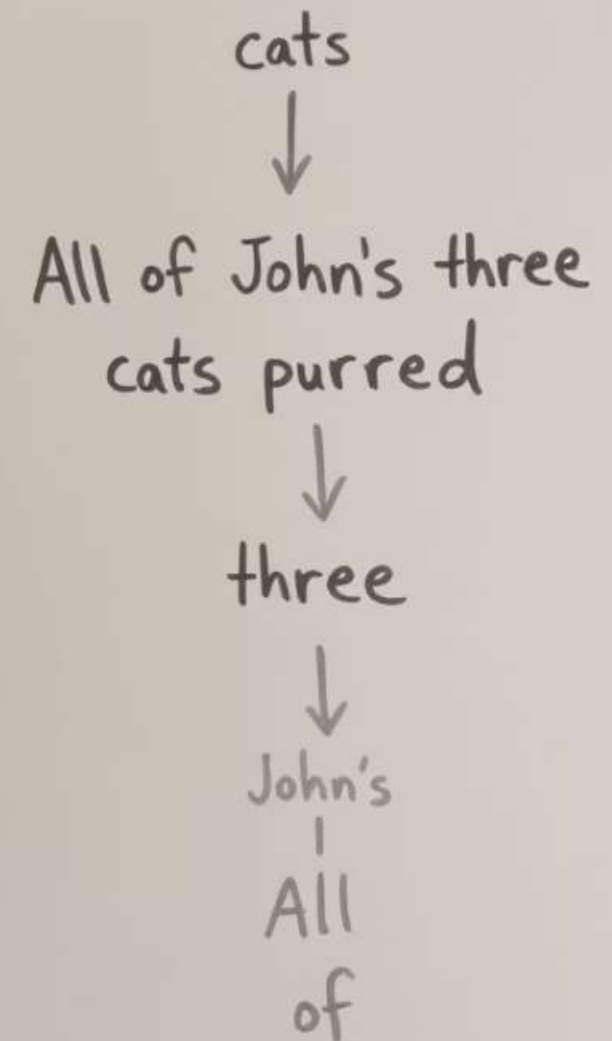
Numerals

Cardinal numerals (one, two, three) and ordinal numerals (first, second, third) are treated as quantifying adjectives within NOM, since they follow determiners.



Quantifying Adjectives

Much, many, few, and little are quantifying adjectives (QA) that come under NOM in NPs. They co-occur with determiners, may function as subject-predicatives, and are gradable.



Modifiers Within Noun Phrases

1

Participle Phrases

Non-finite forms of verbs (progressive, perfect, and passive participles) may appear as pre-modifiers within NOM (e.g., "the leering manager," "a faded dream").

2

Noun Modifiers

Nouns themselves may act as pre-modifiers of nouns, forming compound nouns (e.g., "chess piece," "traffic light"). These always appear last in a sequence of modifiers.

3

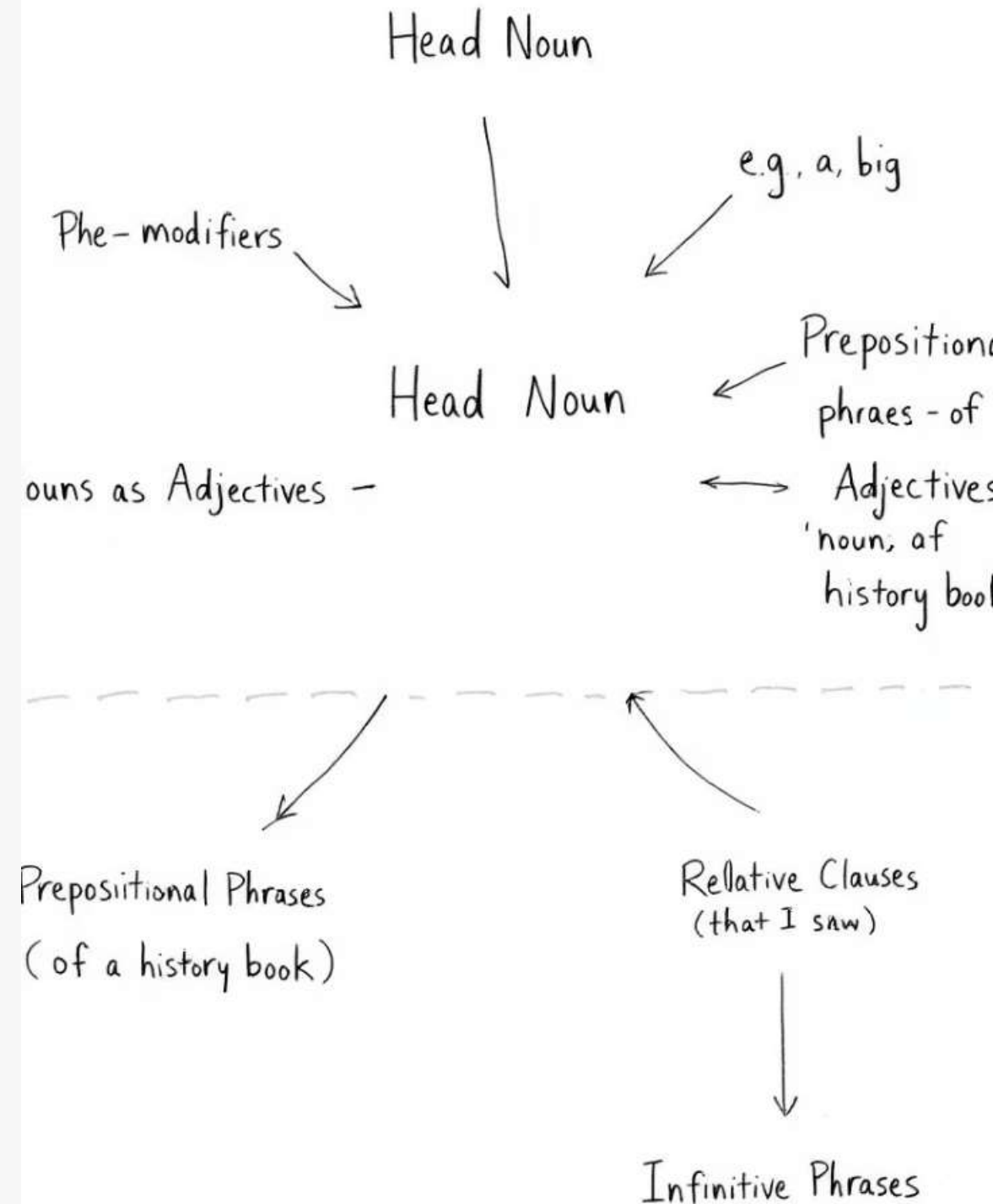
Adjective Phrases

Sequences of more than one AP within NOM show that NOM is a recursive category. Every modifier must be immediately dominated by a NOM.

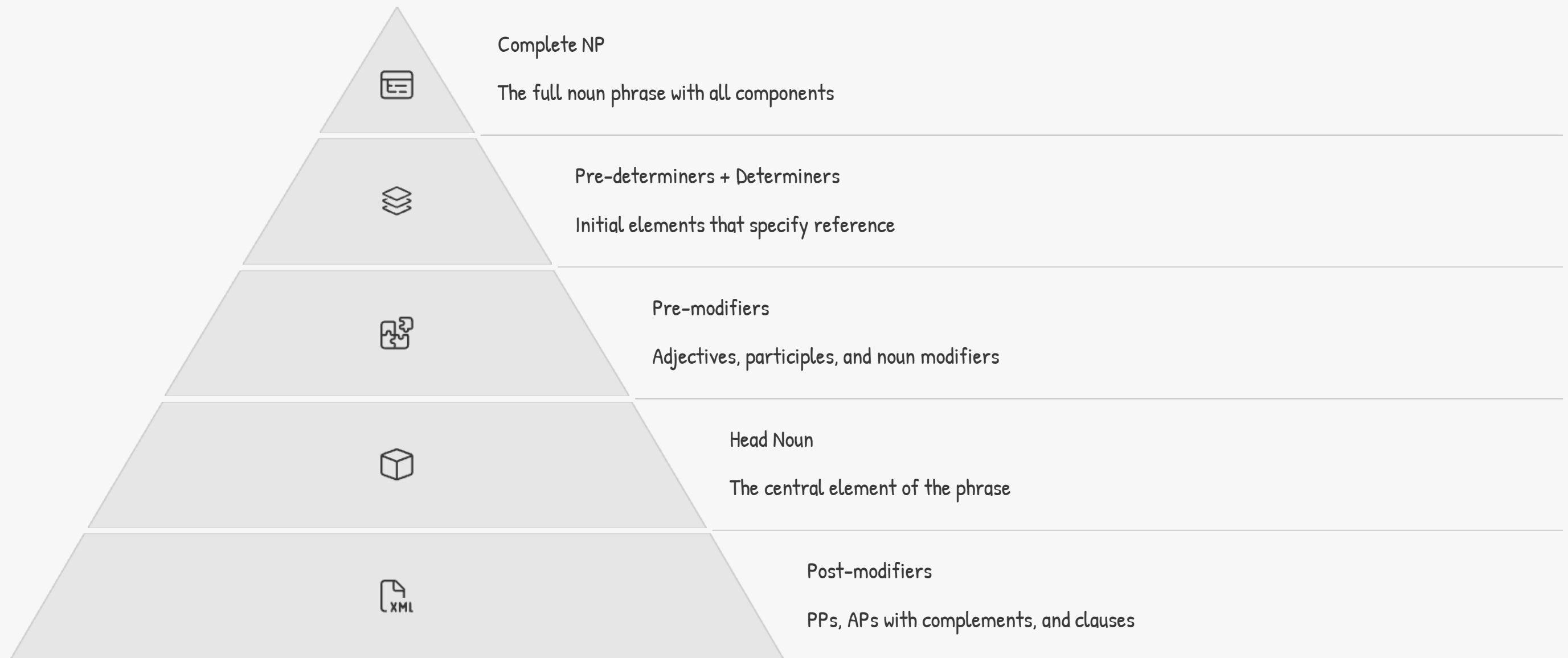
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Post-modifiers

Prepositional phrases and certain adjective phrases can function as post-modifiers within NOM (e.g., "an expedition to the pub").



Structure of Complex Noun Phrases



Complex noun phrases combine multiple elements in a specific hierarchical structure. The "Friendly Head Principle" states that within NOM, the head of a modifying phrase wants to be as close as possible to the head noun, explaining why APs with complements must post-modify the noun.

MODIFICATION OF PRONOUNS

We've said that pronouns replace full NPs. It is rather awkward, therefore, to find pronouns combining with an AP [1a–b] or PP [2a–b] *within* the structure of an NP.

- [1a] something interesting. [1b] anyone beautiful.
[2a] someone in the town. [2b] no-one/none from the factory.

In the case of indefinite pronouns such as *something/one*, *anything/one*, *nothing/no-one/none*, what's happened, historically, is that a determiner (*some*, *any*, *no*) and a head noun (*thing/one*) have coalesced into a single word (some interesting thing → something interesting, any beautiful one → anyone beautiful). The fact that such pronouns can only be post-modified (not pre-modified, as in *beautiful anyone) is connected with this historical fact.

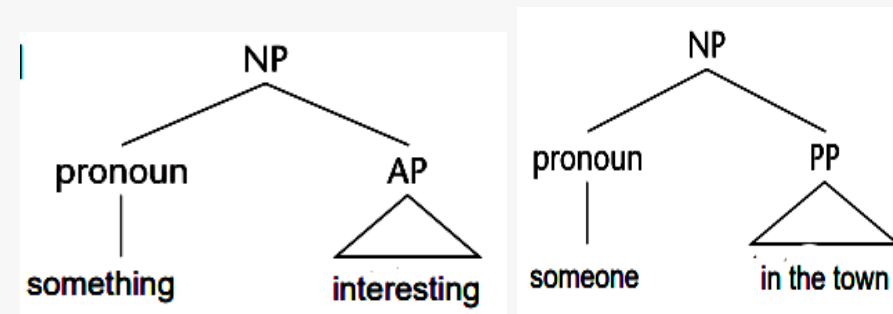
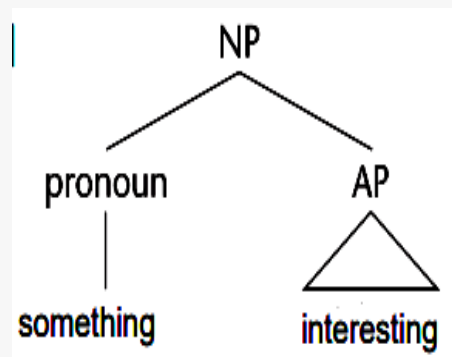


Figure 13. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.156)

The same analysis might seem appropriate, especially since the italicised words are sometimes categorised as pronouns:

- [1a] some of the animals.
[1b] those in the cabin.
[2] all/ both/ half of the bottles.



Conclusion and Key Takeaways

Fundamental Role

Noun phrases play a fundamental role in sentence structure, functioning as subjects, objects, or complements.

Structural Complexity

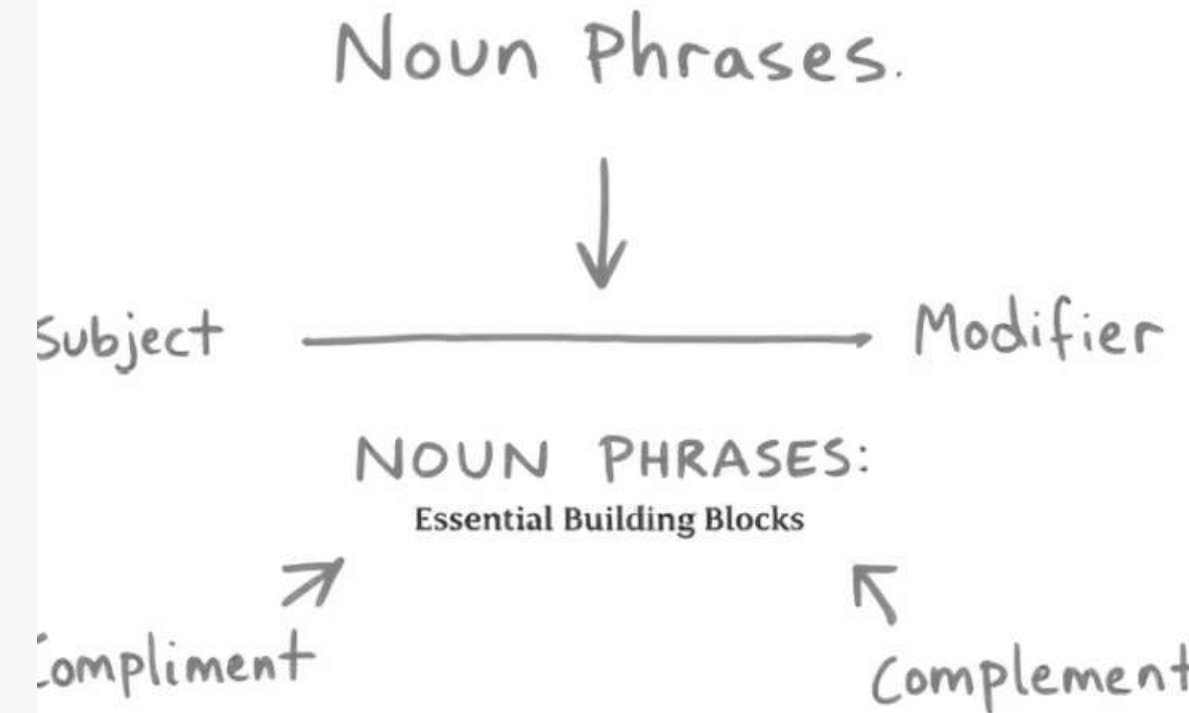
NPs range from simple single-word expressions to complex phrases with multiple modifiers, determiners, and complements.

Hierarchical Organization

The internal structure of NPs follows specific patterns with determiners, pre-modifiers, head nouns, and post-modifiers arranged in a hierarchical organization.

Foundation for Further Study

Understanding NP structure sets the stage for exploring more complex sentence structures and how all phrasal categories contribute to sentence formation.





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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Sashka Jovanovska¹, PhD, Marija Talevska², MA, Marija Tashkoska³, MA

¹ Assistant professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University, Stip, Republic of North Macedonia, e-mail:

saska.jovanovska@ugd.edu.mk, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3965-8697>

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