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THE STRUCTURE OF NOUN PHRASES

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APSTRACT

In this paper will be explored the internal structure of **noun phrases (NPs)** in greater detail, focusing on how they are constructed beyond just single words like pronouns or names. Up to this point, the it is done the primarily examined the internal structure of verb phrases (VPs), looking at components such as:

- **Complements** of verbs in VPs
- **Adverbials** in VPs
- **Auxiliary verbs** and their complements in VPs.

However, now our attention is focused to **Noun Phrases (NPs)**, which are crucial building blocks of sentence structure. While a simple NP can consist of a single word such as a pronoun ("he," "they") or a name ("John," "Paris"), we'll focus on more complex noun phrases, which often contain additional elements, such as determiners, adjectives, and other modifiers.

Keywords: nouns, noun phrases, complements, modifiers,

INTRODUCTION

An idea of how phrasal categories (NP, VP, AP, PP and AdvP) fit into the structure of sentences was mentioned. Of these, let's look in detail at the structure of VP: complements of V in VP, adverbials in VP and auxiliary verbs (and their VP complements). In this chapter, we look in more detail at the internal structure of other phrasal categories, Noun Phrases in particular. So far we've only looked at the internal structure (such as it is) of NPs consisting of just a pronoun or just a name – single words that count as full NPs in themselves. Here's a reminder of what they look like.

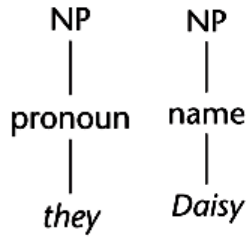

Figure 1. Noun Phrase (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.141)

The NP node in the previous representation is said to be non-branching – it just goes straight down. **NPs consisting of a pronoun or a name are the only non-branching NPs allowed for in this book.** All other NPs have branching representations. They all have two immediate constituents. **In the basic case, the two immediate constituents of NP are: DET and NOM (Determiner and Nominal).** Here are two examples:

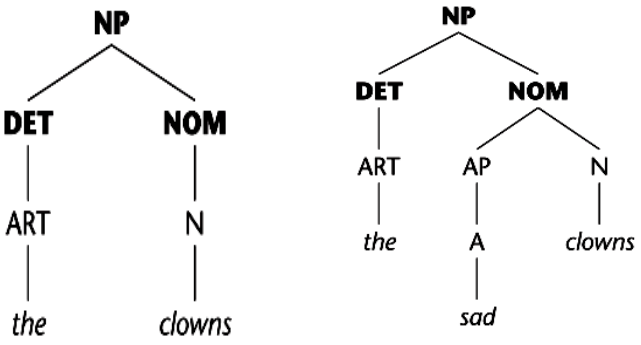

Figure 2. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.141)

DET always has NOM as its sister. DET determines NOM (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.142). NOM is a level of NP-structure intermediate between the phrasal (NP) level and the lexical (N) level. In second example *sad* is a modifier of the head noun. All modifiers of the head noun fall under NOM. Since modifiers are optional, it follows that NOM can consist just of N. Look first at the elements that can come under the DET node.

DETERMINERS

These are a fixed set of 'grammatical' words that give information relating to definiteness and indefiniteness (roughly, whether the thing referred to by the NP is familiar to both speaker and hearer or not) and information about quantity and proportion.
The basic determiners are the articles (ART): the definite article – *the* – and the indefinite article – *a(n).*
The articles are 'basic' in the sense that they provide a touchstone as to what counts as a determiner. Any expression that occupies the same position in NP structure as an article counts as a determiner. How can you tell whether an expression is occupying the same (determiner) position as an article? Well, if a word can appear in sequence with an article – put another way, if a word can co-occur with an article – in an NP, then that word must be analysed as occupying a different position; it cannot be the determiner.
There is a small set of words which perform the same function as the articles:

- **demonstratives (DEM):** this, that, these, those
- **certain quantifiers (Q):** some, any, no, each, every, either, neither
- **possessives (POSS):** my, your, its, her, his, our, their, John's

None of these can co-occur in sequence with an article in an NP – see, for example: **this the clown, *the this clown, *a some clown, *some a clown, *the my shoe, *your the shoe,*any a day.* So they are determiners themselves. There are the phrase marker representations of *those trampolines, some mistake, and my address*.

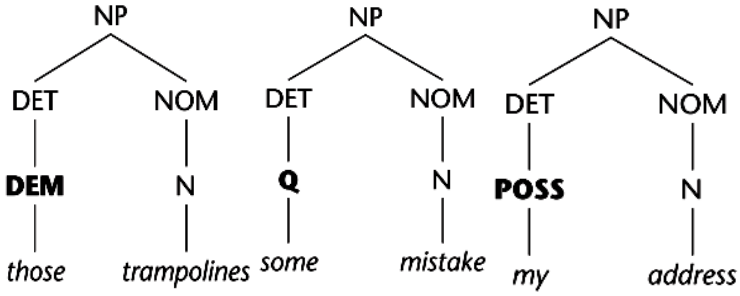

Figure 3. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.142)

Now here's an important point: the determiner position may not always be filled by an actual word. Look at the subject NPs in the following:

Essays must be word-processed.
Smoke gets in your eyes.

Although these NPs contain just one word, they should still be analysed as having a [DET + NOM] structure, as in:

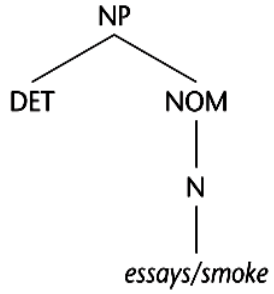

Figure 4. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.143)

The reason for this **'empty determiner'** analysis is this. First, both of these NPs could take a determiner (the/some smoke, the/your essays). We need to allow for this by making a DET slot available. Second, the empty determiner affects the interpretation of the NP.
The empty determiner gives the NP an indefinite and/or more general interpretation. The subject of [*Smoke* gets in your eyes.], for example, is clearly indefinite, as compared with the definite NP the/that smoke. It is also more general than the indefinite NP some smoke. Which head nouns can take the empty determiner? There are just two types of noun that can: plural count nouns (as in [*Essays* must be word-processed.]) and mass nouns (as in [Smoke gets in your eyes.]). As mentioned, the subjects in in the examples are single-word NPs – and they have that in common with NPs that consist of a pronoun or a name.

But the empty DET + NOM analysis clearly distinguishes these NPs from pronoun NPs and name NPs. The lack of a determiner with a name indicates neither indefiniteness nor generality. On the contrary, names don't normally take determiners precisely because names are inherently definite and individual (not general). Pronouns, too, are inherently definite (e.g. she, we, they, them) or inherently indefinite (someone, anyone), independently of any determiner.

Consider now the NP in:
John's father.
John's was listed above among the possessive determiners. Now, John is a name and names count as full NPs in their own right. So it appears that a possessive determiner (POSS) can either be simple (my, your, etc.,) or consist of a full NP plus *'s*. This is called the possessive, or genitive, 's. The addition of 's to John makes for a possessive determiner.

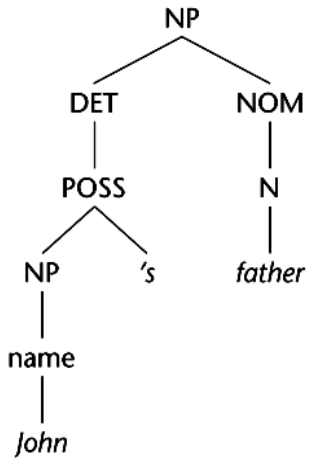

Figure 5. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.144)

More generally, the addition of genitive *'s* to any NP makes for a possessive determiner.1 And there's nothing to prevent possessive determiner NPs displaying all the structure that other NPs do, including DET + NOM.

PRE-DETERMINERS

Consider now the words *all, both, and half*. These resemble the determiners we have looked at. However, they do co-occur with and precede determiners:

[1] all the men [1] both those trampolines [1] half Jim's money

So they can't be determiners themselves. Instead, we categorise them as predeterminers (PRE-DET). Expressions like *double, treble,* and *so forth* are also pre-determiners (e.g. double that amount). In deciding how pre-determiners fit into the structure of NPs, we must decide what they (pre-)determine. Give this a thought. Notice the following: within the NP *all the men,* there is a sequence that looks very much like a familiar constituent, namely *the men.* What, then, would you suggest as a likely analysis of *all the men?*

The points just made suggest that pre-determiners determine an NP. The predetermined NP in [1] consists of the (DET) + men (NOM). And the whole thing is itself an NP. So PRE-DET should be represented as sister of an NP within NP:

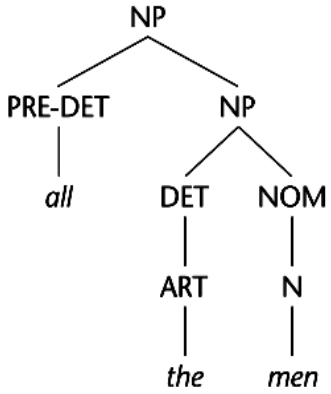

Figure 6. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.145)

But now look at:

all men / both men.

Although they don't precede determiners in these NPs, all and both are still analysed as pre-determiners here. The determiner position itself is empty. The idea that there is an empty determiner with *all*, is perhaps more plausible than with *both.* All men (= all DET men) is both more indefinite and more general than all the men.

By contrast, *both the men* and *both men* differ neither in definiteness nor generality. Nevertheless, we'll continue to analyse *both* as a pre-determiner since, as [both those trampolines] shows, it can co-occur with, and precede, the article. The majority of determiners and all the pre-determiners are capable of functioning as if they were pronouns:

I've always wanted *those*.
Some fell on stony ground.
John's are turning blue.
All is ruined.

Among the determiners that cannot function as pronouns, there are some that correspond to forms that can. For example, the quantifier no cannot function as a pronoun (*I want no) but it corresponds to none, which can (I want none). And with the possessives, we find the following alternations:

DETERMINER: my your her his our their
PRONOUN: mine yours hers his ours theirs

It's predictable that pre-determiners, which pre-determine full NPs, should be able to co-occur with pronouns.

QUANTIFYING ADJECTIVES

Much, many, few, and little are quantifying adjectives (QA). As adjectives, they come under NOM in NPs. Here are the reasons for treating them as adjectives (rather than determiners) (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.146):

(a) Like adjectives, they co-occur with and follow determiners (those many books, the little butter that I have, some few successes). But remember, the determiner may be empty, many books (= DET many books), much garlic (= DET much garlic).
(b) Like adjectives, they may occur in the VP, functioning as subject-predicatives: His mistakes were many, It wasn't much, It was little enough.
(c) Like adjectives, they are gradable: very many books, too much garlic, so few ideas, very little tact, where they are modified by DEG. The comparative and superlative forms of many and much are more and most; of little, less and least; of few, fewer, and fewest.

Numerals (the cardinal numerals one, two, three . . . and the ordinal numerals first, second, third…) should also be treated as quantifying adjectives within NOM, since they follow DET (the one mistake), including empty DET (DET one mistake). Quantifying adjectives (QAs) are head of AP. APs with a QA as head always precede other APs in NOM.

PARTICIPLE PHRASES (PartP)

The non-finite forms of verbs referred to the progressive, perfect, and passive participles (V-part, for short) may also appear as pre-modifiers within NOM:

PROGRESSIVE	PERFECT or PASSIVE
[1a] the leering manager	[2a] a faded dream
[1b] the sleeping guard	[2b] the departed nymphs
	[2c] sliced cake
	[2d] a forgotten valley

In this position, the perfect and passive participles can only be distinguished by appealing to the meaning. [1a and b] are perfect, referring to a dream that has faded and nymphs who have departed. [2c and d], by contrast, are passive – *they refer to cake that has been sliced and a valley that has been forgotten.*
Since these forms are verbal rather than adjectival, they are not gradable: *the very leering manager, *rather sliced cake, *the slightly sleeping guard. But they can be modified by general adverbs, as in the rapidly congealing gravy.

NOUNS

Nouns themselves may act as pre-modifiers of nouns. Examples are *chess piece, traffic light, roof maintenance, carbon trader, computer game.* The relation between a head noun and

a pre-modifying noun is much closer than that between the head noun and any other pre-modifier. In a sequence of modifiers that includes a noun modifier, noun modifiers always appear last. They can't be separated from the head noun.

some expensive roof maintenance

**some roof expensive maintenance*

Such noun–noun combinations are compound nouns. They are not treated as phrasal, but as compound words. The compound noun roof maintenance should therefore be dominated by N as in:

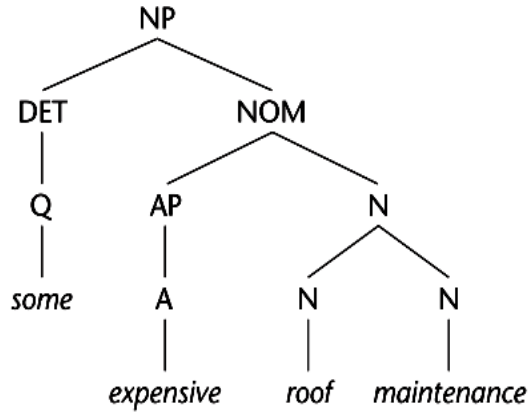

Figure 7.Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.148)

MORE ON THE STRUCTURE OF NOM

How should sequences of more than one AP within NOM be represented? Consider:

a red car / *a new red car*

Before deciding how [*a new red car*] should be represented, give the phrase marker for [*a red car*]. So [red car] is a NOM. Now, there's no reason to suppose that it is not a NOM in [*a new red car*] as well. On that assumption, new must be modifying the NOM [red car]. The important thing to notice here is that, for [*a new red car*], we need two NOMs. This follows from the comments of the preceding paragraph.

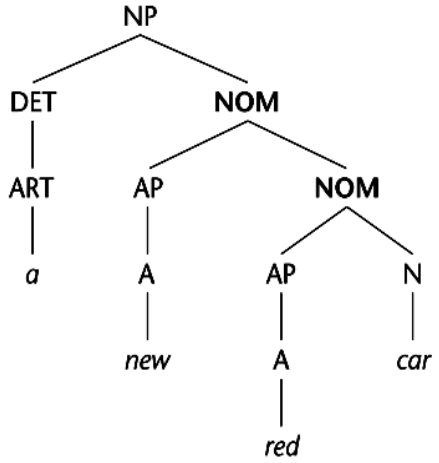

Figure 8. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.149)

What this shows is that NOM is a recursive category. In other words, NOM can have NOM as an immediate constituent. In fact, apart from noun modifiers, **every modifier must be immediately dominated by a NOM.**

POST-MODIFIERS

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

In the NP *an expedition to the pub*, the head N is *expedition* and it is modified by the PP *to the pub*, which consists of P + NP. In this case, we have a postmodifying (PP) sister to the noun, within NOM. So:

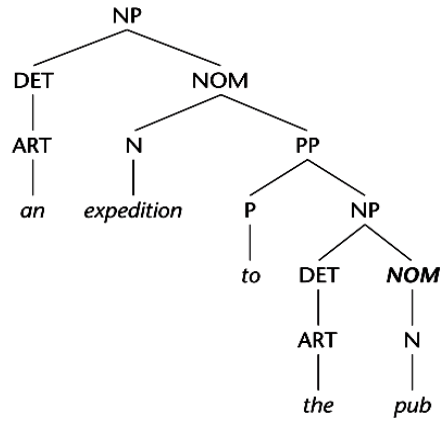

Figure 9. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.150)
Now, just as expedition can be modified by a PP, so can pub. For example: (an expedition to) the *pub in the village.*

All the NPs considered so far have included just pre-modifiers or just post-modifiers. **What happens when NOM includes both a pre-modifying AP and a post-modifying PP?** Remember, there must be as many NOMs as there are modifiers. There are two possibilities, then:

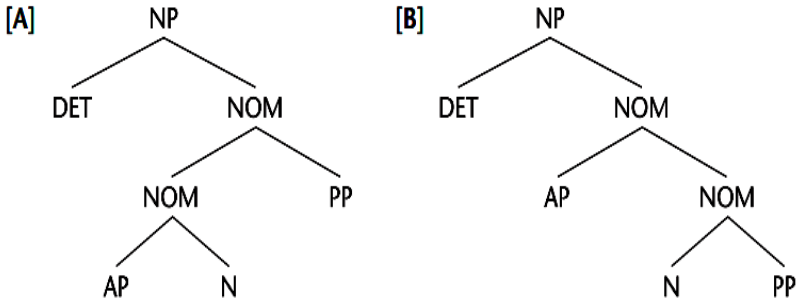

Figure 10. Example of tree diagram (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.152)

Analysing [that nuclear scientist from Germany.] as in [B] – *[nuclear] [scientist from Germany] – is not right. Nuclear scientist denotes a category of scientist. Since such a category exists, it's appropriate there should be an expression to denote it. So [nuclear scientist] is a constituent of [that nuclear scientist from Germany.]. The distinction between nuclear and from Germany (in their relation to scientist) is brought out by noting that, while *That [nuclear*

scientist] IS from Germany is quite natural, *That [scientist from Germany] IS nuclear* is just bizarre. Assuming the PP from *Germany* means what *German* means, the same bizarre effect is achieved by the ordering **that nuclear German scientist*, where nuclear is again separated from the element it wants to form a constituent with. By contrast, that German nuclear scientist is fine. All this indicates analysis [A] for *[that nuclear scientist from Germany.]* – from Germany modifies [nuclear scientist].

As regards the NP, for example, note its parallelism to the sentence:

[a] Milan's neat summary of the argument. (NOUN PHRASE)
[b] Milan neatly summarised the argument. (SENTENCE)

In the sentence, the argument is the direct object of the verb summarised. As a complement, it combines with summarised (V) to form a VP – and that VP is modified by neatly. Now, it's reasonable to expect the structural configuration of the NP to parallel that of the sentence. After all, [a] is simply sentence [b] recast as an NP:

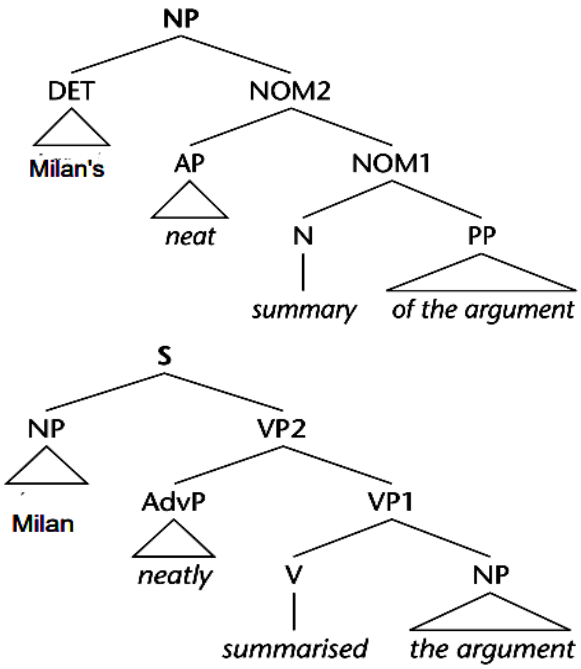

Figure 11. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.153)

Only the categories have changed. Notice that the NOMs in the NP match the VPs in the S.

MORE ON ADJECTIVE PHRASES

A few adjectives (including *present, absent, responsible, visible*) can pre-modify or post-modify the head noun in NOM.

[1a] the responsible crew [1b] the crew responsible
[2a] the absent members [2b] the members absent

As post-modifiers, APs occupy the same position in the structure of NOM as PPs. A difference in meaning is associated with this difference in position of the AP. In [1a] the crew are responsible sort of people – that's their nature. But in [1b] they are responsible FOR something. In [2a] they are the not present members. But in [2b] they were absent AT (i.e. not attended) some event. In contrast to the pre-modifying APs, when an AP appears in the post-modifying position, we hope you agree it feels as if something has ellipted from the AP. The ellipted element functions as **complement of the adjective.** In the following APs, the complement is explicit.

responsible for the students

When, in an NP, a modifying AP includes a complement, it always post modifies the head noun:

the teacher responsible for the students

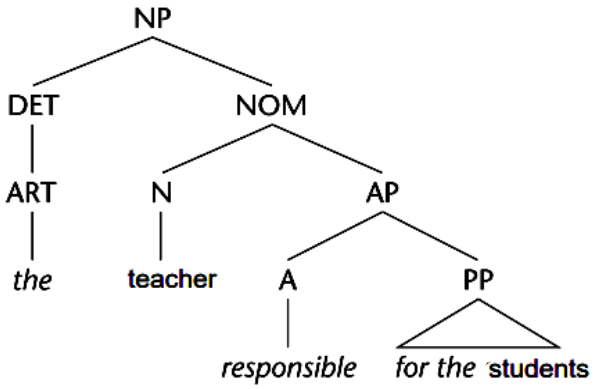

Figure 12. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.155)

There's a reason why such APs must post-modify the Noun. Call it 'The Friendly Head Principle' (FHP): within NOM, the head of a modifying phrase wants to be as close as possible to the head noun. In [*the teacher responsible for the students*], the head of the AP (responsible) is right next to the head of the NP (teacher).

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.

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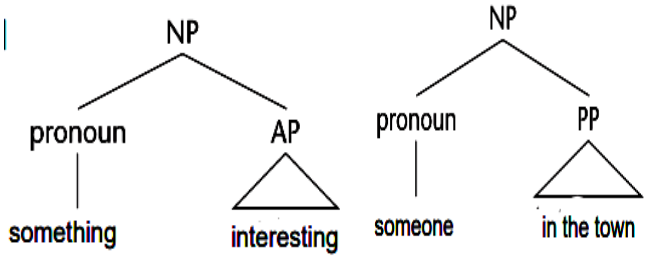

Figure 13. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.156)

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.

However, if (big 'if') they are pronouns, notice they are also determiners or pre-determiners. In fact, genuine pronouns, which cannot also function as determiners or pre-determiners, cannot be post-modified*: *they from the factory, *he of the men*.

It's arguable, then, that the 'pronouns' in are not pronouns at all, but are what they always were: determiners or pre-determiners. They only appear to have changed into pronouns – and thus be functioning as the head of their NP because the real head of the NP has been ellipted. This suggests that for example, should be analysed in which animals is the ellipted head:

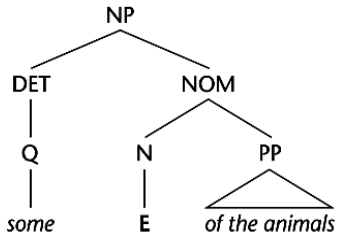

Figure 14. Example of tree diagram NP (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.156)

Let's adopt this elliptical head analysis. This maintains the categorisation of the italicised words as determiners/pre-determiners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, noun phrases (NPs) play a fundamental role in the structure of sentences. While seeing that simple NPs can be as short as a single word (such as a pronoun or a name), more complex NPs often include a variety of elements that expand the meaning and detail of the phrase. These elements can include:

- Head nouns that act as the central word of the phrase,
- Determiners (like "the," "a," "my"), which provide more specific reference,

- Adjectives that modify the noun to describe it further, and
- Noun complements (such as prepositional phrases or clauses), which offer additional information or clarification.

By understanding the internal structure of noun phrases, we gain insight into how meaning is built in sentences and how various components function together to create more nuanced expressions. NPs are often the subject, object, or complement in a sentence, making them crucial for constructing clear and detailed communication.

This exploration of noun phrases sets the stage for further study into more complex sentence structures, helping to form a deeper understanding of how all phrasal categories contribute to sentence formation.

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