

Nouns, Determinatives, and NPs

Plan for the next part of the course:

- Nouns and their definition
- The category of Determinatives
- The Determiner function
- The DP Hypothesis and why it's a mistake
- Prenominal attributive modifiers
- Pronouns, and why they are really nouns
- Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular **they**

Defining nouns: what the general public thinks

'I got through 12 years of state funded schooling with the sum total of my grammatical knowledge being — Nouns are thing words, verbs are doing words, and adjectives are describing words. I suspect we never covered adverbs.'

John Wilkins, on his blog
Evolving Thoughts (14 June 2008)

Defining nouns: history without evolution

'We declared war on terror. We declared war on **terror** – it's not even a noun, so, good luck. After we defeat it, I'm sure we'll take on that bastard ennui.'

Jon Stewart, in a graduation address
at the College of William and Mary

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'I think – uh – the con– th... the phrase “the war on terror” – uh – as... as if there could be a war on an adjective, I mean it's – it's just – or an adverb – it doesn't really work.'

Stefan Halper, Senior Fellow at the Carnegie
Council on Ethics and International Affairs
in New York, interviewed on radio WHYY

Defining nouns: history without evolution

Where did the ‘thing-word’ caricature come from?

- Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762): A noun is ‘the name of any thing conceived to subsist, or of which we have any notion’
- Murray, *English Grammar* (1795): A noun ‘is the name of any thing that exists, or of which we have any notion’
- Curme, *English Grammar* (1925): ‘A noun . . . is the name of a living being or lifeless thing’
- Garner, in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (2003): ‘A noun is a word that names something’

250 years of saying the same old same old!

Nouns: they don't all denote things

- fire*: process of combustion (rapid oxidation)
- absence*: not being there
- emptiness*: nothing being there
- failure*: not managing to
- lack*: failing to be provided when needed
- method*: how (by what means) something is done
- assistance*: being there with supportive actions

Nouns: they don't all denote things

<i>fire</i> :	process of combustion (rapid oxidation)
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We don't get our definition of 'Noun' from metaphysics;
we get our metaphysics from the use of our nouns.

Nouns: what they do have in common

- Four inflectional forms: singular and plural plain case × singular and plural genitive case
- Serve as heads of NPs with functions like Subject, Object, Predicative Complement, Complement of Preposition
- Preceded by determinatives like *the* or *a(n)*
- Modified by (preceding) adjectives like *big*
- Modified by (following) relative clause modifiers like *who I didn't recognize*

Nouns: an irregular paradigm

Inflectional forms of ***child***, a highly irregular lexeme with four distinct phonological forms in its paradigm:

	PLAIN	GENITIVE
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Phonologically, regular nouns are only half as complex:

Inflectional forms of **dog**

	PLAIN	GENITIVE
SINGULAR	<i>/dag/</i>	
PLURAL		<i>/dagz/</i>

Determinatives as a distinct category

The 'qualifies a noun' definition of Adjective leads all dictionaries to include among the adjectives:

- (i) both the articles (*the*, *a(n)*)
- (ii) both demonstratives (*this*, *that*)
- (iii) all quantifiers (*all*, *some*, *most*, *several*, ...)
- (iv) all numerals (*one*, *two*, ..., *243*, ...)
- (v) the dependent genitive forms of pronouns (*my*, *your*, ...)

Treating these as Adjectives makes a complete hash of the syntactic properties of that category.

Determinatives as a distinct category

The proposal defended here (and in *CGEL*):

- Determinative is a **category** of words (like Noun or Preposition), distinct (but not disjoint) from Adjective, containing about 35 basic items plus all the numerals.
- **Determiner** is a **function** (like Subject or Head).
- Determinatives often (but not always) serve as Determiner.
- The Determiner function is often (but not always) filled by a Determinative.
- **Genitive NPs** can also serve in Determiner function.

Determinatives as a distinct category

A Grammar of Spoken English (Harold Palmer and F. G. Blandford, 1939) cites some criteria for distinguishing adjectives from a class of **determinatives** (Fr. *adjectifs déterminatifs*) from the class of adjectives:

(a) Determinatives cannot be used predicatively.

Alert residents objected. ~ *The residents were alert.*

All residents objected. ✗ **The residents were all.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

- (b) Determinatives only rarely express grade (comparison).

Those who succeeded were more motivated than the others.

**Those who succeeded were more most than the others.*

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**Those who succeeded were more most than the others.*

- (c) Determinatives only rarely take modifiers, and in particular do not take intensifying modifiers.

[Very alert] residents objected.

**[Very all] residents objected.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

Four considerably more reliable criteria also distinguish Adjectives from Determinatives:

- (d) Determinatives do not stack, or even (for the most part) co-occur in NP structure.

Responsible, alert, intelligent residents helped out.

**These, the, all residents helped out.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

- (e) Adding a Determinative can make a singular count noun into a grammatical NP but adding an adjective cannot:

I heard [_{NP} this guy] *was asking about me.*

**I heard* [_{NP} thin guy] *was asking about me.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

- (f) Most Determinatives occur in the **fused determiner-head** construction, where a Determinative serves as Determiner and Head simultaneously and thus constitutes a whole NP. No adjective does this.

I'd like to hear more about [_{NP} *this*].

**I'd like to hear more about* [_{NP} *thin*].

Determinatives as a distinct category

- (g) Most Determinatives occur with a following *of*-phrase in the **partitive** construction, which no adjective can do.

[_{NP} *Some of the children*] *began to cry.*

*[_{NP} *Small of the children*] *began to cry.*

Take [_{NP} *all of the samples*] *that you like.*

**Take* [_{NP} *pretty of the samples*] *that you like.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

In addition (though this is just a curiosity, and not very important), there is a phonological condition sufficient to guarantee **non**-adjectivehood:

- (h) Adjectives can never begin with phonological /ð/, but determinatives can, and some do (*that*, *the*, *this*).

As a result of a historical accident, initial /ð/ is never found in Nouns, Verbs, or Adjectives.