

6

Below the clause *groups and phrases*

6.1 *Groups and phrases*

We have seen in Chapters 3-5 that the English clause is a composite affair, a combination of three different structures deriving from distinct functional components. These components (called 'metafunctions' in systemic theory) are the ideational (clause as representation), the interpersonal (clause as exchange) and the textual (clause as message). What this means is that the three structures serve to express three largely independent sets of semantic choice. (1) Transitivity structures express representational meaning: what the clause is about, which is typically some process, with associated participants and circumstances; (2) Mood structures express interactional meaning: what the clause is doing, as a verbal exchange between speaker-writer and audience; (3) Theme structures express the organization of the message: how the clause relates to the surrounding discourse, and to the context of situation in which it is being produced. These three sets of options together determine the structural shape of the clause.

The three functional components of meaning, ideational, interpersonal and textual, are realized throughout the grammar of a language. But whereas in the grammar of the clause each component contributes a more or less complete structure, so that a clause is made up of three distinct structures combined into one, when we look below the clause, and consider the grammar of the group, the pattern is somewhat different. Although we can still recognize the same three components, they are not represented in the form of separate whole structures, but rather as partial contributions to a single structural line. The difference between clause and group in this respect is only one of degree; but it is sufficient to enable us to analyse the structure of the group in one operation, rather than in three operations as we did with the clause.

At the same time, in interpreting group structure we have to split the ideational component into two: EXPERIENTIAL and LOGICAL. So far what we have been describing under the 'ideational' heading has been meaning as organization of experience; but there is also a logical aspect to it — language as the expression of certain very general logical relations — and it is this we have to introduce now. The logical component defines complex units, e.g. the CLAUSE COMPLEX discussed in the next chapter. It comes in at this point because a group is in some respects equivalent

to a **WORD COMPLEX** — that is, a combination of words built up on the basis of a particular logical relation. This is why it is called a **GROUP** (= 'group of words'). It is also the reason why in the western grammatical tradition it was not recognized as a distinct structural unit: instead, simple sentences (that is, clauses, in our terms) were analysed directly into words. Such an analysis is still feasible provided we confine our attention to the sort of idealized isolated sentences that grammarians have usually dealt with, such as *Socrates runs* or *John threw the ball*; even there, however, the 'words-in-sentences' model ignores several important aspects of the meanings involved, and in the analysis of real-life discourse it leads to impossible complexity. Describing a sentence as a construction of words is rather like describing a house as a construction of bricks, without recognizing the walls and the rooms as intermediate structural units.

In this chapter we shall examine the structure of the three main classes of group: nominal group, verbal group and adverbial group; along with a brief reference to preposition and conjunction groups. The final section will be concerned with the prepositional phrase. A **PHRASE** is different from a group in that, whereas a group is an expansion of a word, a phrase is a contraction of a clause. Starting from opposite ends, the two achieve roughly the same status on the rank scale, as units that lie somewhere intermediate between the rank of a clause and that of a word.

6.2 *Nominal group*

Consider the following clause, spoken by a three-year-old child:

Look at those two splendid old electric trains with pantographs!

Most of this clause consists of one long nominal group, *those two splendid old electric trains with pantographs*. This group contains the noun *trains* preceded and followed by various other items all of them in some way characterizing the trains in question. These occur in a certain sequence; and the sequence is largely fixed, although some variation is possible.

We can interpret the first part of this nominal group structurally as in Figure 6-1.

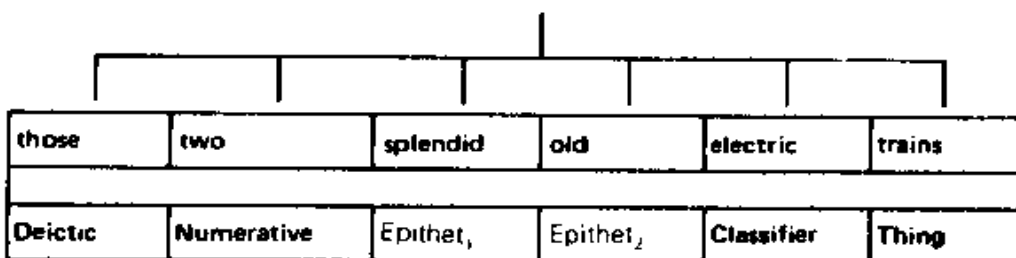


Fig. 6-1 Experiential structure of part of a nominal group

This is an experiential structure which, taken as a whole, has the function of specifying (i) a class of things, namely *trains*, and (ii) some category of membership within this class. We shall refer to the element expressing the class by the functional label **Thing**.

6.2.1 Experiential structure of the nominal group: from Deictic to Classifier

Categorization within the class is typically expressed by one or more of the functional elements Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier. We will consider each of these in turn.

(1) *Deictic*. The Deictic element indicates whether or not some specific subset of the Thing is intended; and if so, which. It is either (i) specific or (ii) non-specific. For further discussion of these, see Chapter 9, Section 9.2 below.

(i) The specific Deictics are given in Table 6(1).

Table 6(1) Items functioning as specific Deictic

	Determinative	Interrogative
Demonstrative	<p>this that these those the</p>	<p>which(ever) what(ever)</p>
Possessive	<p>my your our his her its their one's {John's} {my father's} etc.</p>	<p>whose(ver) [which person's] etc.</p>

The subset in question is specified by one of two possible DEICTIC features: either (i) demonstratively, i.e. by reference to some kind of PROXIMITY to the speaker (*this, these* = 'near me'; *that, those* = 'not near me'), or (ii) by possession, i.e. by reference to PERSON as defined from the standpoint of the speaker (*my, your, our, his, her, its, their* (see Figure 6-8 below); also *Mary's, my father's*, etc.) together with the possibility of an interrogative in both these categories (demonstrative *which?*, possessive *whose?*). All these have the function of identifying a particular subset of the 'thing' that is being referred to.

Many languages embody these two forms of deixis in the structure of the nominal group. The two are closely related, both being (as indicated by the term 'deixis') a form of orientation by reference to the speaker — or more accurately, to the 'speaker-now', the temporal-modal complex that constitutes the point of reference of the speech event. In some languages they are more systematically related to each other, the demonstrative having three terms instead of two: 'near me', 'near you' and 'not near either of us'. (Note that 'near' is not restricted to a local interpretation; the meaning is 'associated with' in some sense.) Some dialects of English have a system of this kind, the three terms being *this, that* and *yon*, with corresponding locative adverbs *here, there* and *yonder*.

There is one more item in this class, namely *the*. The word *the* is a specific, determinative Deictic of a peculiar kind: it means 'the subset in question is identifiable; but this will not tell you how to identify it — the information is somewhere around, where you can recover it'. So whereas *this train* means 'you know which

train: — the one near me', and *my train* means 'you know which train: — the one I own', *the train* means simply 'you know which train'. Hence *the* is usually accompanied by some other element which supplies the information required: for example, *the long train* means 'you know which train: you can tell it by its length'. Compare *the night train, the train with a pantograph, the next train to arrive*. If there is no such information supplied, the subset in question will either be obvious from the situation, or else will have been referred to already in the discourse: for example, if you are on the platform you can say *get on the train!*, while *the train was coming nearer and nearer* might occur as a part of a narrative.

(ii) Non-specific Deictics are given in Table 6(2).

Table 6(2) Items functioning as non-specific Deictic

		singular		non-singular		unmarked
				dual	mass/ plural	
total	positive	each every		both	all	
	negative		neither (not either)			no (not any)
partial	selective	one	either			some [SAM] any
	non-selective	a(n)			some [sm]	
		'one'		'two'	'not one'	(unrestricted)

These convey the sense of all, or none, or some unspecified subset; for example, *both trains have left, is there a train leaving soon?, there are some trains on the track, some trains are very comfortable, I haven't noticed any trains go by*.

It should be pointed out here that there are two different systems of NUMBER in the English nominal group, one associated with each of the two kinds of Deictics.

(i) With specific Deictics, the number system is 'non-plural/plural'; mass nouns are grouped together with singular, in a category of 'non-plural'. So *this, that* go with non-plural (singular or mass), *these, those* with plural, as in Table 6(3).

Table 6(3) Number in specific nominal groups

non-plural		plural
singular	mass	
this train	this electricity	these trains

(ii) With non-specific Deictics, the system is 'singular/non-singular'; mass nouns are grouped together with plural, in a category of 'non-singular'. So *a, an* goes with singular, weak *some* with non-singular (mass or plural), as in Table 6(4).

If there is no Deictic element, the nominal group is non-specific and, within that,

Table 6(4) Number in non-specific nominal groups

singular	non-singular	
	mass	plural
a train	(some) electricity	(some) trains

non-singular.* In other words, a nominal group may have no Deictic element in its structure, but this does not mean it has no value in the Deictic system — simply that the value selected is realized by a form having no Deictic in the expression.

There may be a second Deictic element in the nominal group, one which adds further to the identification of the subset in question. We will refer to these as POST-DEICTIC, or DEICTIC₂.

The post-Deictic identifies a subset of the class of 'thing' by referring to its fame or familiarity, its status in the text, or its similarity/dissimilarity to some other designated subset. Among the words most frequently occurring as post-Deictic are:

other, same, different, identical; complete, entire, whole; above, aforementioned; certain, customary, expected, famous, given, habitual, necessary, normal, notorious, obvious, odd, ordinary, original, particular, possible, probable, regular, respective, special, typical, usual, various, well-known

For example, *the same two trains, the well-known Mr John Smith, his usual silly self, a certain vague disquiet.*

(2) *Numerative*. The Numerative element indicates some numerical feature of the subset: either quantity or order, either exact or inexact. The Numeratives are given in Table 6(5).

Table 6(5) Items functioning as Numerative

	definite	indefinite
quantitative	one two three etc. [a couple of] etc. [a quarter of] etc.	few little [a bit of] etc. several [a number of] etc. many much [a lot of] etc. fewer less more [the same amount of] etc.
ordinative	first second third etc. next last	preceding subsequent etc.

(a) The quantifying Numeratives (or 'quantitatives') specify either an exact number (cardinal numerals, e.g. *two trains*) or an inexact number (e.g. *many trains, lots of trains*).

* The forms *trains* and *some trains*, as in *there are (some) trains on the track*, are not in fact identical. But the distinction is a more delicate one, and for the purpose of this analysis they will be treated as variant expressions of the same category.

(b) The ordering Numeratives (or 'ordinatives') specify either an exact place in order (ordinal numerals, e.g. *the second train*) or an inexact place (e.g. *a subsequent train*).

An inexact Numerative expression may be exact in the context; for example, *just as many trains* ('as mentioned before'), *the next train* ('from now'). On the other hand, an exact Numerative expression may be made inexact by SUBMODIFICATION, as in *about ten trains, almost the last train*.

(3) *Epithet*. The Epithet indicates some quality of the subset, e.g. *old, long, blue, fast*. This may be an objective property of the thing itself; or it may be an expression of the speaker's subjective attitude towards it, e.g. *splendid, silly, fantastic*. There is no hard and fast line between these two; but the former are experiential in function, whereas the latter, expressing the speaker's attitude, represent an interpersonal element in the meaning of the nominal group. This distinction is reflected in the grammar in various ways.

The principal difference between the two is that experiential Epithets are potentially defining, whereas interpersonal ones are not. Take the example of *long* in *long train*. If I say *a long train*, you cannot tell which particular train I am talking about, because the Deictic *a* is non-specific; but if I say *the long train*, the specific Deictic *the* indicates that you can tell, and that the necessary information is contained in the experiential Epithet *long*. This particular train, in other words, is defined by its length, relative to some norm — perhaps some other train or trains that are present in the context. If I use an attitudinal Epithet, on the other hand, such as *mighty* in *along there came a mighty train*, this is not defining and it does not become defining even following the specific Deictic *the*. In *the mighty train came thundering down the track*, the word *mighty* does not identify this particular train by contrast with some unmighty ones.

Even in the superlative, which, with experiential Epithets, is almost always used to define (e.g. *ours was the longest train*), an attitudinal Epithet is still not defining. For example, *he said the silliest things* is normally equivalent to *he said some very silly things*. A word like *silliest* can be used to define, as in *the silliest things of all were said by the chairman*; but in that case it has an experiential function. Note that, in general, the same word may act as either experiential or interpersonal Epithet; most of the latter are adjectives of size, quality or age, e.g. *lovely, little, old*. Since expressions of attitude tend to be strung throughout the clause, rather than being associated with one particular place, there are very few words that serve only an attitudinal function.

Attitudinal Epithets tend to precede experiential ones. They may even precede Numeratives, giving them a post-Deictic flavour as in *those lovely two evenings in Bali*. They also tend to be reinforced by other words, or other features, all contributing to the same meaning: synonyms (e.g. *a horrible ugly great lump*), intensifiers, swear-words, particular intonation contours, voice quality features and the like.

(4) *Classifier*. The Classifier indicates a particular subclass of the thing in question, e.g. *electric trains, passenger trains, wooden trains, toy trains*. Sometimes the same word may function either as Epithet or as Classifier, with a difference in meaning: e.g. *fast trains* may mean either 'trains that go fast' (*fast* = Epithet) or 'trains

classified as expresses' (*fast* = Classifier). The line between Epithet and Classifier is not a very sharp one, but there are significant differences. Classifiers do not accept degrees of comparison or intensity — we cannot have *a more electric train* or *a very electric train*; and they tend to be organized in mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets — *a train* is either *electric*, *steam* or *diesel*. The range of semantic relations that may be embodied in a set of items functioning as Classifiers is very broad: it includes material, scale and scope, purpose and function, status and rank, origin, mode of operation — more or less any feature that may serve to classify a set of things into a system of smaller sets.

A sequence of Classifier + Thing may be so closely bonded that it is very like a single compound noun, especially where the Thing is a noun of a fairly general class, e.g. *train set* (cf. *chemistry set*, *building set*). In such sequences the Classifier often carries the tonic prominence (see Chapter 8, Section 8.4 below), which makes it sound like the first element in a compound noun. Noun compounding is outside the scope of the present book; but the line between a compound noun and a nominal group consisting of Classifier + Thing is very fuzzy and shifting, which is why people are often uncertain how to write such sequences, whether as one word, as two words, or joined by a hyphen (e.g. *walkingstick*, *walking stick*, *walking-stick*).

We have now identified the nominal group functions of Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier and Thing. The classes of word which most typically realize these functions are as follows:

Deictic determiner	Deictic ₂ adjective	Numerative numeral	Epithet adjective	Classifier noun or adjective	Thing noun
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But there are other possibilities: for example, numeral occurring as Classifier, as in *first prize*, or embedded nominal group as possessive Deictic, e.g. *the day before yesterday's paper*.

These word classes — noun (= common noun), adjective, numeral and determiner — are all different kinds of NOUN; they are sub-classes of this one primary class. This larger class are sometimes referred to as 'nominals', to avoid confusion with 'noun' in its narrower, more specific sense. Other words also enter into the nominal group, namely words of the class VERB, which may function as Epithet or Classifier. Verbs function in the nominal group in one of two forms:

- (i) present (active) participle, *V-ing*, e.g. *losing*, as in *a losing battle*;
- (ii) past (passive, or intransitive active) participle, *V-en*, e.g. *lost*, as in *a lost cause*.

When functioning as Epithet, these forms usually have the sense of the finite tense to which they are most closely related: the present participle means 'which is (was/will be) . . . ing', the past participle means 'which has (had/will have) been . . . ed'. When functioning as Classifier, they typically have the sense of a simple present, active or passive: present (= active) 'which . . . s', past (= passive) 'which is . . . ed'.

Examples:

Verb as Epithet

- (i) a galloping horse ('a horse which is galloping')
- a bleeding nose ('a nose which is bleeding')

If however the verb is one which does not normally take the 'present in present' tense *be . . . ing* (i.e. a verb expressing a mental or relational process), the distinction between 'which . . . s' and 'which is . . . ing' is neutralized; the next pair of examples are also Epithets:

- the resulting confusion ('the confusion which results')
- a knowing smile ('a smile which [suggests that the smiler] knows')
- (ii) a wrecked car ('a car which has been wrecked')
- a fallen idol ('an idol which has fallen')

Verb as Classifier

- (i) a stopping train ('a train which stops')
- a travelling salesman ('a salesman who travels')
- (ii) a tied note ('a note which is tied')
- spoken language ('language which is spoken')

It is natural that the more lasting attribute should tend to have a classifying function. But the present participle as Classifier does not exclude the sense of 'which is . . . ing', as in *the rising/setting sun*; and conversely, the past participle as Epithet does not always carry the meaning of 'which has been . . .', since many such forms are in fact adjectives, as in *a haunted house, a crowded train*. The same word may be now one, now the other: in *Would you like a boiled egg?* *boiled* is Classifier, 'which gets boiled', contrasting with *fried, poached* or *scrambled*; while in *You must drink only boiled water here*, *boiled* is Epithet 'which has been boiled'. In *He got stuck in a revolving door*, either interpretation is possible: Classifier 'of the kind which revolves', Epithet 'which was revolving' (cf. *fast trains* above). Note finally that the fact that a particular expression is a cliché does not imply that the modifying element is necessarily a Classifier — the 'permanence' is merely a feature of the wording! Thus in *a considered opinion, a heated argument, the promised land, a going concern*, the verbs are all Epithets: 'which has been considered', 'which has become heated' 'which has been promised', 'which is going [well]'.

Often the participle is itself further modified, as in *a fast-moving train, a hard-boiled egg*. The resulting compound may embody any one of a number of different experiential relations, e.g. *well-meaning, habit-forming, fund-raising, right-angled, fruit-flavoured, pear-shaped, architect-designed, simple-minded, bottle-nosed, iron-fisted, two-edged*. What is happening here is that some part of the experiential structure of a clause is being downgraded to function as Epithet or Classifier; it is a reduced form of a non-finite clause and hence agnate to a (finite or non-finite) Qualifier (see next Section). We have already glossed *boiled water* as 'water which has been boiled'; but the latter is itself another possible form of wording, systematically related to the first: *boiled water/water which has been boiled*. Compare *a train which was moving fast, eggs which are (Classifier)/have been (Epithet) boiled hard, a house designed by an architect, activities which (are intended to) raise funds*, and so on.