ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN FOCUS.
THE PHRASE

ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN FOCUS SERIES

English grammar in focus is a series of handbooks aimed to familiarise university students with the essentials of English grammatical description. It is a comprehensive introduction to all levels of grammatical description, from the morpheme, as the smallest unit of grammar, to larger stretches of language where grammar merges with other disciplines like text and discourse analysis.

Series Editor: Juan Santana Lario

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Marta Falces Sierra
Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio
Salvador Valera Hernández

JUAN SANTANA LARIO
(ed.)

ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN FOCUS.
THE PHRASE

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FOREWORD

"It is at the rank of phrase that there is most confusion – because there are here the greatest difficulties – in the description of English."
M.A.K. Halliday

This is the third of the four volumes that comprise the series *English Grammar in Focus*, a collection of handbooks that is aimed to familiarise university students with the essentials of English grammatical description. Although each volume can be used as a self-contained coursebook, the series as a whole is intended to serve as a comprehensive introduction to all levels of grammatical description, from the morpheme, as the smallest unit of grammar, to larger stretches of language where grammar merges with other disciplines like text and discourse analysis.

The series has three main aims: (i) to introduce students to the main categories and structures of English grammar, and help them to recognise and analyse these structures; (ii) to provide them with the descriptive tools and terminology necessary to undertake an explicit and systematic description of English grammar at all levels; (iii) to introduce them to the essentials of linguistic argumentation. The series presupposes little or no previous background in English grammatical description and will provide students with an accurate understanding of grammar that will allow them both to enhance their English language skills and to acquire a solid grounding for further linguistic study. To achieve these goals, along with an accurate description of the categories and structures under study, a wealth of other features are included in each book of the series, such as exercises, detailed glossaries and subject indexes for ease of reference, and lists of books and articles for further reading.

English Grammar in Focus. The Phrase offers a detailed study of the phrase, traditionally considered as intermediate between the word and the clause in the hierarchy of grammatical units, as suggested by definitions such as "an expansion of a word" or "a contraction of a clause". The first chapter introduces the general features of this unit, including its functional potential and its internal structure, and makes a broad distinction between two main kinds of phrases, endocentric and exocentric. Each of the following chapters discusses one of the major endocentric phrases, i.e. noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase and adverb phrase, as well as the main exocentric phrase, the prepositional phrase. As in the other books in the

series, the approach is mostly descriptive and theory-neutral, but given the many descriptive difficulties mentioned in Halliday's quote above, alternative analyses of problematic aspects are occasionally presented and innovative views developed by the authors of the different chapters are offered as a contribution to the on-going discussion of specific aspects of this much-debated grammatical unit.

The chapters in this volume have been authored by experienced scholars in the teaching of descriptive English grammar at university level and with long trajectories in linguistic research. The texts have been tested in the classroom over a number of years at the University of Granada, Spain, and have benefited enormously from the feedback provided by both students and colleagues with whom the topics covered in the handbook have been discussed at length.

As the series editor, I want to express my gratitude to the co-authors of this handbook, my colleagues at the English and German Department, Ana Díaz-Negrillo, Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, Salvador Valera Hernández, and very especially our former colleague, now blissfully retired, Luis Quereda Rodríguez-Navarro, who graciously accepted to update for this volume his previous research on the many intricacies of the verb phrase and whose ideas about the unit phrase in general have largely inspired the contents of this volume. This book is humbly dedicated to him.

Juan Santana
Series Editor

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND NOTATIONAL CONVENTIONS

Classes of units

Adj	Adjective
AdjP	Adjective phrase
Adv	Adverb
AdvP	Adverb phrase
Art	Article
Aux V	Auxiliary verb
Cl	Clause
Conj	Conjunction
Dem	Demonstrative
GP	Genitive Phrase
Intens	Intensifier
IntensP	Intensifier Phrase
N	Noun
Noml	Nominal
NP	Noun phrase
PP	Prepositional phrase
Prep	Preposition
QP	Quantifier phrase
Quant	Quantifier
Sub Conj	Subordinating conjunction
V	Verb
VP	Verb phrase
XP	Any kind of phrase

Grammatical features / forms

Ø	Zero
Comp	Comparative
Def	Definite
-ed$_1$	Past tense form
-ed$_2$	Past participle form
Excl	Exclamative
Ind	Indicative
Indef	Indefinite
Inf	Infinitive
-ing	Present participle form
Inter	Interrogative
Per	Person
Pl	Plural
Pr	Present
Relat	Relative
Rest	Restrictive
Sb	Subjunctive
Sg	Singular

Syntactic functions

A	Adverbial
AS	Auxiliary System
C	Complement
Co	Object Complement
Cs	Subject Complement
Dep	Dependent
Det	Determiner
Ext Dep	External Dependent
Extr S	Extraposed Subject
H	Head
Mod	Modifier
MV	Main Verb
O	Object
Od	Direct Object
Oi	Indirect Object
Oprep	Prepositional Object
P	Predicator
Pred	Predicate
Q	Qualifier
Rel	Relator
S	Subject

Other

EGIF-WM Santana, J. (ed.), 2015. *English Grammar in Focus. Words and Morphemes*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada.

EGIF-CL Santana, J. 2019. *English Grammar in Focus. The Clause*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada.

Notational conventions

Bold in main text for technical terms included in the Glossary or when first introduced and sometimes for later occurrences too

Italics for citing examples

Underlining and **bold** in examples to highlight part of an example

Superscripts to indicate word form (e.g. *get·s*$^{3rdPer.Sg.Pr.Ind}$)

Subscripts to indicate function or class of unit (e.g. [*the*$_{Det\ /\ Art}$ *house*$_{H\ /\ N}$]$_{S\ /\ NP}$)

The symbol '·' to mark a morphological division within a word or a component part of word, as in '*walk·ed*'

* to mark ungrammatical examples

?? to mark examples of questionable acceptability

CHAPTER ONE

THE PHRASE AS A GRAMMATICAL UNIT

JUAN SANTANA LARIO

1.1 Introduction: definition of phrase as a grammatical unit
1.2 Functions of phrases
1.3 Internal structure: phrasal constituents
Further reading
Exercises

Summary

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the **phrase** as an intermediate unit in the hierarchy of grammatical units between the word and the clause. It introduces the main phrasal functions and constituents and distinguishes between two main kinds of phrases, endocentric and exocentric.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF PHRASE AS A GRAMMATICAL UNIT

As explained in the first volume in this series, the description of the **grammar** of a language relies on the identification and definition of a set of **grammatical units** which are hierarchically organised in a **rankscale** according to their degree of complexity (see *EGIF-WM*, chapter 3). In this hierarchy, the unit known as **phrase** occupies an intermediate place between **clauses** and **words**, which means that, on the one hand, phrases typically function as constituents within clauses and, on the other hand, they typically consist of words:

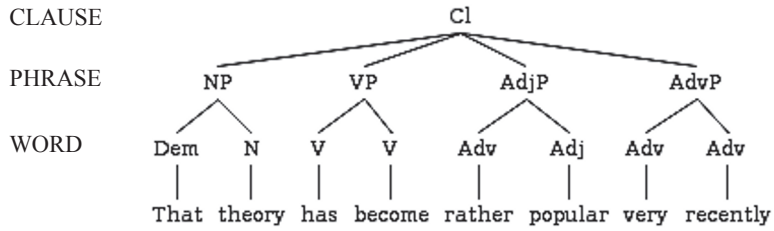

Figure 1. Phrases in the hierarchy of grammatical units

The connection between words and phrases is particularly relevant since, as we will see, the latter can be considered as expansions of single words by the addition of a number of dependent elements and, in some cases, they may consist of a single word. Furthermore, phrases are called by the name of the word-class to which their most important constituent belongs. Thus, a **noun phrase** is a kind of phrase whose main constituent, known as the **Head**, is realised by members of the word-class noun; a **verb phrase** has a lexical verb as its main element, and so on. As illustrated above, the four main open word-classes, i.e. noun, lexical verb, adjective and adverb, have corresponding phrases associated to them: noun phrase (*that **theory***), verb phrase (*has **become***), adjective phrase (*rather **popular***) and adverb phrase (*very **recently***). Additionally, some smaller word-(sub-)classes like prepositions, quantifiers or intensifiers also have associated phrases, so that grammars often talk of **prepositional phrases** (e.g. *under the tree*, *across the ocean*), **quantifier phrases** (e.g. *so many (people)*, *too little (time)*), or **intensifier phrases** (e.g. *far too (many)*, *as (little) as possible*).

Although there has been a tendency in grammars to present the phrase as a homogeneous grammatical unit, so that all phrases would function as clause constituents and all of them would consist of a Head word plus some optional dependents, the actual situation is much more complicated than that and most phrases present peculiar aspects that are worth discussing separately. Thus, in this book, once the general properties of the phrase as a grammatical unit are presented in this chapter, each of the major phrases will be discussed separately.

Like most other grammatical units, phrases can be defined on the basis of two main kinds of properties: a) their functional potential, i.e. the *external* syntactic roles or functions they perform within other grammatical units, and b) their formal properties, i.e. their own *internal* structure and the formal realisations of their main constituents. These properties are described in the following sections.

1.2 FUNCTIONS OF PHRASES

In terms of their functional potential, phrases are grammatical units that work primarily as constituents of the unit immediately above them in the grammatical hierarchy, i.e. the clause, where they realise all the main syntactic functions.

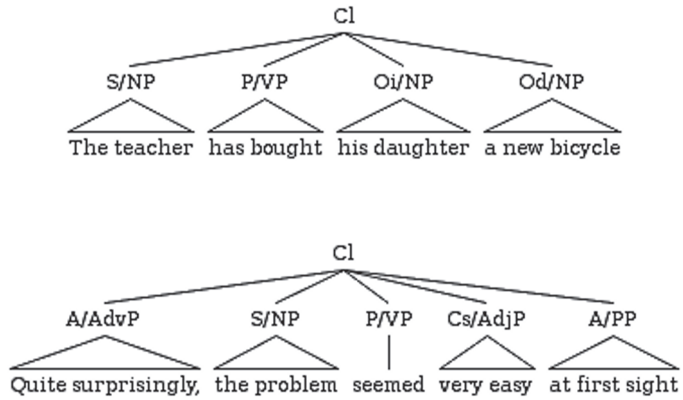

Figure 2. Phrases as clause constituents

As the examples above illustrate, there are systematic correspondences between certain clause constituents and certain kinds of phrases, so that Subjects and Objects tend to be realised by noun phrases, the Predicator is always realised by a verb phrase, the Subject Complement is very often realised by an adjective phrase and Adverbials are typically realised by adverb phrases and prepositional phrases. However, with the sole exception of the Predicator, which is always realised by a verb phrase, most other clause constituents allow a certain degree of variation in their realisation by different kinds of phrases, as illustrated by the following examples, where the highlighted constituents are realised by other phrases than those shown above:

(1) [***After five o'clock***]$_{S\,/\,PP}$ *is* [***the best time to meet***.]$_{Cs\,/\,NP}$
(2) *Mary feels* [***on top of the world***.]$_{Cs\,/\,PP}$
(3) *I wrote a letter* [***to the Ambassador***.]$_{Oi\,/\,PP}$ [***last week***]$_{A\,/\,NP}$

Besides their main functions as immediate clause constituents, most phrases also function as constituents within other phrases as a result of a phenomenon traditionally known as **rankshift**, whereby a unit of a given rank (e.g. phrase) functions as a constituent of a unit of the same rank or even of a unit which is one step lower down the rankscale. Thus, in the following example we have several cases of phrases functioning as constituents within other phrases:

(4) [the difficulties [implicit [in [this kind [of [undertaking]$_{NP}$]$_{PP}$]$_{NP}$]$_{PP}$]$_{AdjP}$]$_{NP}$

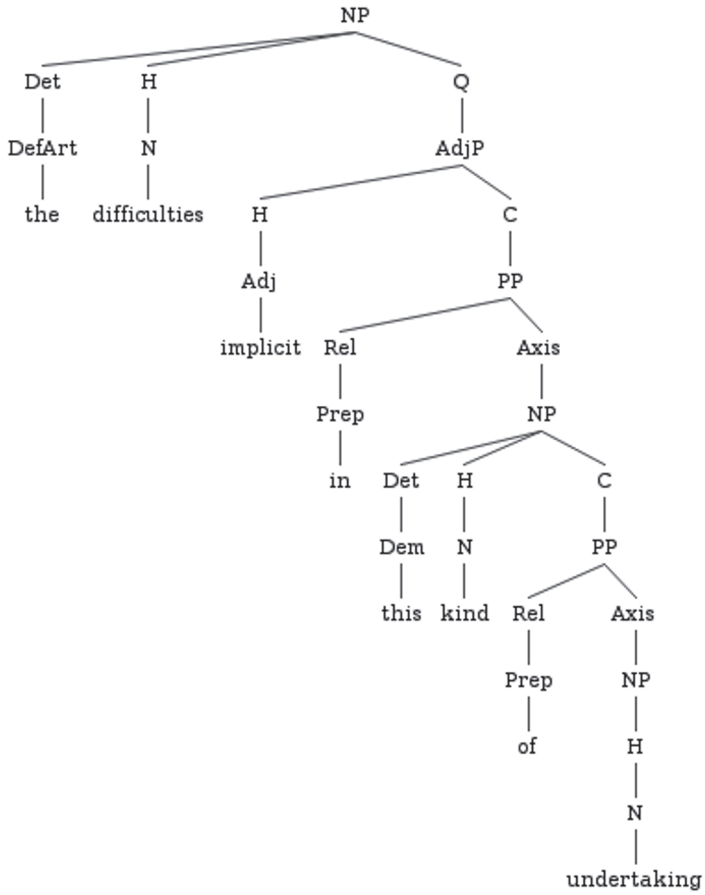

Figure 3. Phrases as constituents within other phrases

Along with the major types of phrases (noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase and prepositional phrase), which can function both at clause level and at phrase level, as we have seen, there are minor types of phrases which only operate at phrase level, i.e. as constituents of other phrases, and for which the concept of rankshift does not apply since they never appear realising any constituent at clause level. This is the case of some quantifying or intensifying expressions that only operate as dependents within the structure of noun or adjective phrases, and have themselves the typical structure of phrases, as in the following examples:

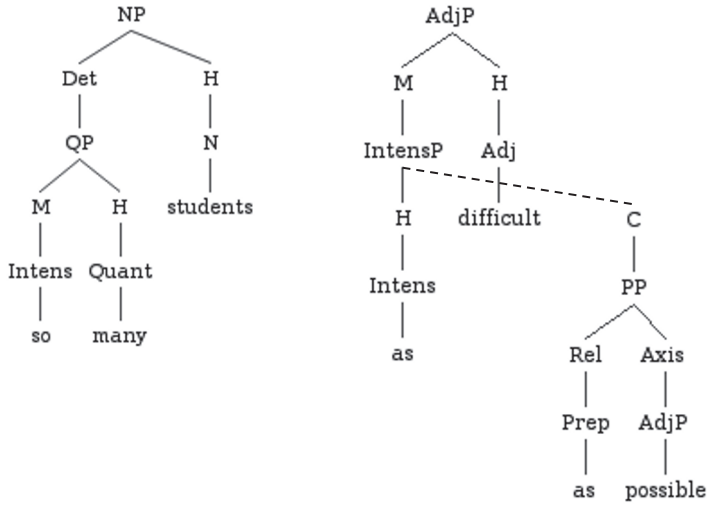

Figure 4. Quantifier and Intensifier Phrases

Notice, however, that many other quantifying or intensifying expressions with a phrasal structure combine their most typical function as dependents in various kinds of phrases (nominal, adjectival, adverbial phrases), as in the (a) examples below, with a function at clause level, typically as Adverbials of degree, as in the (b) examples:

(5) a. *I have **so much** work to do.*
b. *She works **so much**.*

(6) a. *John makes **less** money **than I do**.*
b. *John earns **less than I do**.*

1.3 INTERNAL STRUCTURE: PHRASAL CONSTITUENTS

Along with their functions, the most distinguishing properties of phrases have to do with their own internal syntactic structure and with the formal realisations of their constituents. In this sense, phrases can be described as **headed** or **endocentric** constructions, i.e. as units that are built around a central, obligatory constituent known as the **Head** which may be optionally accompanied by other constituents known as **Dependents** that appear before or after the Head.