



## CHAPTER I

### NOMINAL MODIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

Traditional grammar has its theory based on the Latin language whose system was believed to be universal, and so English grammar has been traditionally treated in terms of Latin grammar. The traditionalists try to give the rules and definitions for the observed grammatical points of English. For example, there are definitions for the different types of words which appear in English, called parts of speech:

"A noun is the name of a person, place, or thing"

"An adjective is a word that modifies a noun."

"An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective or an adverb."

According to the definitions, the adjective and the adverb are the types of word that are concerned with modifying, the adjective especially playing the role of modifying the noun. Herein lies the weakness of the definition. It cannot cover the English language as a whole because, for example, not only the dirty sink (dirty is an adjective) is a structure of nominal modification but similarly so are such constructions as kitchen sink, our sink, leaking sink, repaired sink, sink upstairs, the sink which we own, etc. There are different types of words besides the adjective, both words and word groups, occurring in the adjective function. The traditional definition of an adjective, therefore,

has concealed a large and important part of English.

Such definitions were perpetuated in the grammars used in the public schools of England and America, grammars which were concerned more with correctness of speech and writing than with the analysis of the structure of language. Language scholars, however, whose knowledge of the history of many languages gave them an insight into the complexities of syntax, held deeper, more penetrating views of language structure.

One such grammarian was Otto Jespersen, a great figure of traditional grammar, who based his treatment of syntax almost completely on meaning. In his book called Modern Grammar on Historical Principles (1913)<sup>2</sup>, he classifies the words of sentences into ranks according to their mutual relations: primary for the main part, secondary for its modifiers, and tertiary for modifiers of secondaries. The primary and secondary are superior in relation to the tertiary, and the secondary is inferior to the primary. This can be seen clearly in a combination like extremely cold weather.

Weather is the primary or principal.

Cold is the secondary or adjunct.

Extremely is the tertiary or subjunct.

The substantives (nouns) always occur as principals, the adjectives as adjuncts, and the adverbs as subjuncts.

---

<sup>2</sup> Otto Jespersen, A Modern Grammar On Historical Principles, Vol. II. (Bredford, Dickens Drayton House London, W.C. 1, 1933)

Later in this book, Jespersen points out that there are many kinds of words (appearing in the work of nineteenth century writers) which are used as the secondaries or adjuncts in noun phrases. They are as follows:

adjective	-- the <u>black</u> one
substantive	-- a <u>stone</u> wall, a <u>cannon</u> ball
genitive case	-- the <u>butcher's</u> shop
proper name	-- <u>Japan</u> table, <u>Reynold</u> pictures
participial group	-- <u>well arranged and admirably</u> <u>carried out</u> performance
infinitive preadjunct	-- <u>not-to-be-forgotten</u> day -- <u>never-to be-answered</u> question
preposition with object	-- <u>after dinner</u> whisky and water -- <u>out-of-doors</u> party
verb with object	-- his <u>breakneck</u> speed
quotation	-- " <u>early to bed</u> " plan
adverb	-- my <u>then</u> opinion -- a <u>now</u> captain -- the <u>well</u> passenger

#### Post - Adjunct

adjective	-- page <u>nineteen</u> -- gentleman <u>born</u> -- God <u>Almighty</u>
infinitive	-- the time <u>to come</u> -- a tongue <u>to speak</u>

clause	-- the boy who speaks the truth
	-- the land <u>where I was born</u>
appositive	-- poet <u>almost clergyman</u>
semi-predicate	-- the member <u>present</u>

In the traditional technique for describing English noun-modification, according to Gleason (1968)<sup>3</sup>, a sentence with structures of nominal modification like The three old ladies upstairs own a boxer dog with a mean temper is treated as follows:

One approach starts by identifying the three major sentence elements as single words.

Ladies is the subject, own is the verb, and dog is the direct object.

These three together constitute the sentence base:

ladies / own / dog.

The remaining sentence elements are all "modifiers":

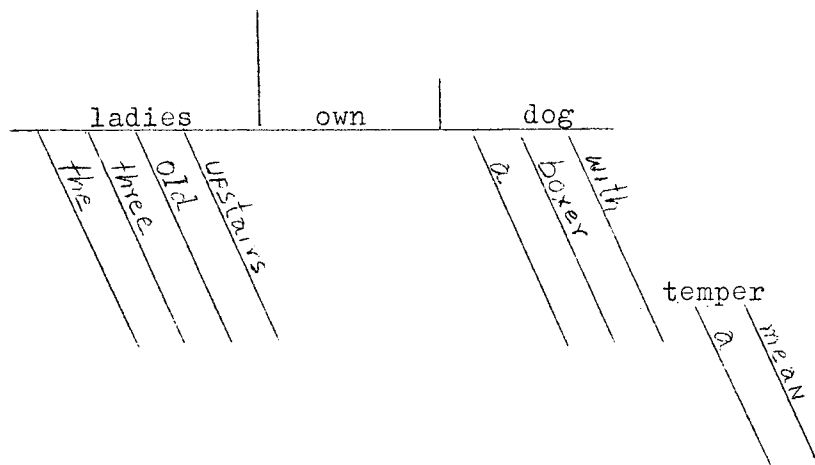
the three, old and upstairs modify ladies; a, boxer, and with a mean temper modify dog.

Another approach is called the base - and - modifier technique such as that in Reed and Kellogg Diagrams<sup>4</sup>. The major sentence elements are put on a single straight line and the modifying elements are hung on this, thus indicating more-or-less clearly their subordinate status.

---

<sup>3</sup> H.A. Gleason Jr., Linguistics and English Grammar. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965) pp. 138-142.

<sup>4</sup> Joe D. Palmer, The Grammars of English and Curriculum Reform. Doctoral Dissertation. (The University of Michigan, 1969)



Slot and filler technique (Gleason, 1965) recognizes the subject - verb - object elements of the above sentence. They are not, however, identified as single words:

The three old ladies upstairs is the subject, own is the verb, and a boxer dog with a mean temper is the direct object. The subject and object are both noun phrases. A noun phrase is considered as having a number of slots or positions for each of which there can be specified appropriate fillers. One of these which is most generally filled is designated head. When a head is present, the slot can most easily be designated by counting outward from it.

For example, N - 5 means the fifth slot before the noun. This slot is filled by certain types of determiners.

	N - 5	N - 4	N - 2	N - 1	N	N + 1	N + 2
Det		Numbers	Adj	Nouns	Nouns (Head)	Adv. (locative)	Prep.Phrase
the		three	old	-	ladies	upstairs	-
a		-	-	boxer	dog	-	with a mean temper
a		-	mean	-	temper	-	

Traditional theories of grammar do not give an accurate explanation of meaning in nominal modification structures in English. There is a lot of discrepancy between the theories and what actually appears in English usage. The explanations given do not cover all of the English constructions. For these reasons, those types of grammar became outdated and the way was opened for a more scientific study of English grammar which is called structural grammar.