In discussing the structure of noun phrases crosslinguistically, I will assume a rather rough characterization of noun phrases, as syntactic constituents which serve as arguments of verbs. There are a variety of ways in which this is inadequate as a precise definition and there are a number of legitimate questions about exactly what ought to be considered a noun phrase, but these issues are somewhat marginal to the primary purposes of this chapter, which is to discuss some of the ways in which noun phrases differ across languages in a way that will be helpful to someone describing noun phrases in a particular language.

It is convenient for the purposes of discussion to distinguish three sorts of noun phrases: (i) simple noun phrases, which contain only pronouns or nouns plus simple modifiers like articles, adjectives, demonstratives, or numerals; (ii) complex noun phrases, which contain more complex sorts of modifiers, like genitive or possessive modifiers and relative clauses; and (iii) various sorts of noun phrases which lack a head noun. These three types are discussed in sections 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

1. Simple noun phrases

The most common noun phrases in many languages contain a single word which is either a noun or a pronoun. In most if not all languages, pronouns generally occur alone in noun phrases without modifiers. Constructions in which pronouns occur with modifiers, as in we linguists or something inexpensive in English, are often possible but infrequently used. Although traditional grammar defines pronouns as words that take the place of nouns, a more accurate characterization of most pronouns is that they take the place of noun phrases. In many languages, it may be difficult to distinguish pronouns from nouns except on a semantic basis.

1.1. Articles

In many languages, probably a majority, it is not only possible but very common for noun phrases to consist of only a noun, as in (1), from Yidj (Dixon 1977a), a Pama-Nyungan language spoken in northeastern Australia. See the beginning of the volume for a explanatory list of the abbreviations used in the glosses.

(1) wagu:da gudaga-ngu bada:l
man.ABS dog-ERG bit
‘the/a dog bit the/a man’

Whether or not this is in general possible in a language hinges considerably on whether the language has articles: the high frequency of noun phrases consisting of just a noun in a language like Yidj reflects the fact that the language lacks articles, while corresponding noun phrases in a language like English would require an article. While English permits noun phrases consisting of just a noun when that noun is a proper noun (I like Pat), a mass noun (I like milk) or the plural of a count noun (I like flowers), this is not possible with the singular of count nouns (*I like flower); in these cases, English requires some sort of determiner (I like this flower, I have brought you a flower).

Many languages have a definite article or an indefinite article but not both. In Kutenai, a language isolate spoken in western Canada and the United States, for example, there is a definite article, as in (2a), but indefinite noun phrases are unmarked, as in (2b).

(2) a. hu wu·kat-i mi? patkiy
1SG see-INDIC the woman
‘I saw the woman’
b. hu wu·kat-i  pəkliy
   1SG  see-INDIC  woman
   ‘I saw a woman’

Less common are languages in which there is an indefinite article but no definite article: Amele (Roberts 1987), a Madang language of Papua New Guinea, has an indefinite article oso, which follows the noun, as illustrated in (3a), but no definite article, as illustrated in (3b).

(3) a. dana oso  ija na  sigin  heje on
      man INDEF  1SG  GEN  knife  illicit  take.3SG.REMOTE.PAST
      ‘a man stole my knife’

b. dana  ho-i-a
      man  come-3SG-PAST.TODAY
      ‘the man came’

In languages with both a definite article and an indefinite article, the two articles often do not form a grammatical class, exhibiting different grammatical properties. For example, the indefinite article in Mupun (Frajzyngier 1993), a Chadic language of Nigeria, appears on the opposite side of the noun from the definite article. In (4a), the indefinite article mee precedes the noun, one of the few modifiers of nouns that does so, while the definite article follows the noun, as in (4b).

(4) a. n-naa  [mee  ngu  nan]  n-tul  fu
      1SG-see  [INDEF  man  adult]  PREP-house  2PL
      ‘I saw an old man at your place’

b. [nlae r  dasa  na]  fii
      [shirt  DEM  DEF]  dry
      ‘this very shirt is dry’

While definite and indefinite articles are obligatory in some languages, there are other languages in which they are optional. For example, while the definite article in Kutenai illustrated above in (2a) is normally present with singular noun phrases denoting humans, it is not obligatory; thus (2b) could also mean ‘I saw the woman’. Similarly, the indefinite article is optional in Kayardild (Evans 1995), a Tangkic language spoken in Australia; it occurs in (5a) (warngiida, glossed ‘one’), but not with the noun phrase interpreted as indefinite in (5b).

(5) a. warngiida dangka-a  rar-ia
      one-NOM  man-NOM  south-CONTIN-NOM
      buruwan-mula-ja  budii-j
      initiation,ground-VABL-MODAL-ACTUAL  run-ACTUAL
      ‘a man ran away southward from the initiation ground’

b. dangka-a  burri-ja  ngijin-ji
      man-NOM  emerge-ACTUAL  1SG-MLOC
      ‘a man ambushed me’

In some languages with optional indefinite articles, the article codes a meaning narrower than that of the indefinite article in English. Often, indefinite articles more specifically mark a referent as prominent in the discourse. Similarly, definite articles have a narrower range of usage in some languages than others. There are at least three common functions associated with definite articles: (i) an anaphoric use, where the noun phrase refers to something mentioned in the preceding discourse; (ii) a nonanaphoric use, where the noun phrase denotes something known to both speaker and hearer but not mentioned in the preceding discourse, such as references to the sun or the moon; and (iii) an intermediate use, where the referent is not itself referred to in the preceding discourse, but is nevertheless linked to or inferrable from
something in the preceding discourse (e.g. the door and the doorbell in *When I arrived, I walked up to the door and rang the doorbell*). In some languages, definite articles are restricted to a subset of these functions. Most commonly, they are restricted to anaphoric uses and are sometime glossed as “previously mentioned”. The definite article *ndi* in Ngiti (Kutsch Lojenga 1994), a Central Sudanic language of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, illustrated in (6), is an instance of a definite article with such a restriction.

(6)  
\[ \text{yà ndi dza} \]  
\[ \text{this DEF house} \]  
\[ \text{‘this house (mentioned before)’} \]

Less commonly, the definite article is restricted to nonanaphoric uses. This is the case with the definite marker *-na* in Karo Batak (Woollams 1996), an Austronesian language of Sumatra in Indonesia. The example in (7) is appropriate in a context where the speaker is buying something and no mention has been made of the money, though it is inferrable in the context of purchasing something.

(7)  
\[ \text{énda sén-\text{-}na} \]  
\[ \text{this money-DEF} \]  
\[ \text{‘here’s the money’} \]

In many languages, words with demonstrative meaning are often used in contexts in which English would use a definite article. In Takia (Ross 2002a), an Austronesian language of Papua New Guinea, for example, the word *an* is used in contexts in which English would use the word “that”, as in (8a), but it is also widely used in contexts in which English would use the definite article, or even ones where English would just use a possessive pronoun (but no article), as in (8b).

(8)  
\[ \text{a. [mau \text{-} an ] w-ani u-mo\text{-}l!} \]  
\[ \text{[taro that] 2SG-eat 2SG-not.want} \]  
\[ \text{‘don’t eat that taro!’} \]

\[ \text{b. [\text{	ext{n}íne-\text{-}g malkouk an ] \text{\text{n}u-bisei-\text{g} ...} } \]  
\[ \text{1SG.POSS-1SG white.person DEF 1SG-depart-REALIS} \]  
\[ \text{‘I left my white master ...’} \]

This is most apparent when one examines texts in a language and finds that a form that is described as a demonstrative is used far more often than one would find with a demonstrative in languages like English. We might describe a situation like this by saying that *an* in Takia has two functions, that of a demonstrative and that of a definite article. However, such a description is probably Eurocentric and it is better to say that the range of meaning covered by *an* includes that of demonstratives and definite articles in other languages. Despite the fact that the word *an* in Takia is often used simply as a marker of definiteness, it is best called a demonstrative because it belongs to a demonstrative paradigm in that language: it is the intermediate member in a set of three demonstratives (the others are proximal *en* and distal *on*), and there are various demonstrative sets of words that vary in the same way, such as the locative adverbs (proximal *ebo*, intermediate *abo*, distal *obo*). Typically, demonstratives used as definite markers are not obligatory. The use of demonstratives as definite markers reflects the fact that they are a common diachronic source for definite articles: they start as demonstratives, get extended to anaphoric usage and then finally (in some cases) can be used nonanaphorically as well. Demonstratives that are used as definite markers are often restricted to anaphoric usage; this is the case, for example, for Takia.

In some languages, it is possible to distinguish definite and demonstrative uses of the same word syntactically. For example, in Ute (Southern Ute Tribe 1980), a Uto-Aztecan language of the western United States, the same lexeme functions as a distal demonstrative when it precedes the noun and as a definite article when it follows the noun.
(9) a. 'ú ta’wácj
   that man
   "that man"

b. ta’wácj 'u
   man DEF
   "the man"

It is also stressed when used as a demonstrative (the acute accent indicates stress), but not when it is used as a definite article.

Somewhat less common is for a language to use a third person pronoun as a definite article, combining with a noun or with words that often function as modifiers of nouns. In Tidore (Van Staden 2000), a West Papuan language of eastern Indonesia, the third person pronoun functions as a definite article. This is illustrated by the third person plural pronoun ona in (10).

(10) ona guru–ge
     3PL teacher–that
     ‘those teachers’

Just as many languages use demonstratives where English would use a definite article, it is similarly the case that many languages use the numeral for ‘one’ in contexts where English would use an indefinite article. This is found in a number of European languages, such as French, illustrated in (11).

(11) un livre
    a/one book
    ‘a book, one book’

In some languages, the form of the indefinite article is the same as that of the numeral for ‘one’, but the syntax is different. In Turkish (Kornfilt 1997), for example, the word bir precedes adjectives modifying the noun when it means ‘one’ but follows the adjectives if it is functioning as an indefinite article, as illustrated in (12).

(12) a. bir güzel olgun elma
     one nice ripe apple
     ‘one nice ripe apple’

b. güzel olgun bir elma
    nice ripe an apple
    ‘a nice ripe apple’

Some languages have articles that code specificity rather than definiteness. For example, Futuna-Aniwa (Dougherty 1983), a Polynesian language of Vanuatu, has two articles which can be called specific and nonspecific. The specific article is used where English would use the definite article or where English would use the indefinite article but where the speaker has a specific referent in mind, as in (13a), while the nonspecific article is used where the speaker has no particular referent in mind, as in (13b).

(13) a. na-n tukia [s ga] fatu
     PAST-1SG hit [SPEC rock]
     ‘I hit against a rock’

b. a roroveka kaseroitia ma [s ga] ika] arau
    ART Roroveka catch NEG [NONSPEC fish] tomorrow
    ‘Roroveka won’t get any fish tomorrow’
Some languages have morphemes that code definiteness but which are probably best not viewed as articles. A number of languages have morphemes that mark direct objects, but only if the direct object is definite, as illustrated by the word ra in Persian (Mahootian 1997), illustrated in (14).

(14) be mina mān [gol ra] dad-əm
to Mina I [flower OBJ.DEF] give.PAST-1SG
‘I gave the flower to Mina’

Such morphemes are generally viewed as postpositions or case markers rather than as definite articles.

Markers of definiteness and indefiniteness are most commonly separate words, but in some languages they are affixes. The example in (15) illustrates a suffix -fekha in Korowai (Van Enk and de Vries 1997), a Trans-New Guinea language of West Papua, that marks the noun phrase as indefinite.

(15) uma-té-do abül-fekha khomilo-bo
tell-3PL.REAL-DIFF.SUBJ man-INDEF die.3SG.REAL-PERF
‘they told that a certain man had died’

Similarly, the example in (16) illustrates a definite prefix on nouns in Egyptian Arabic (Gary and Gamal-Eldin 1982).

(16) ?ūr-taajur-a gaaja
the-plane-F.SG come
‘the plane is coming’

Markers of definiteness and indefiniteness are also often clitics, which sometimes attach to the noun, but in other instances attach to some modifier of the noun. Example (17) illustrates this in Fyem (Nettle 1998), a Niger-Congo language of Nigeria, where the definite article =mo cliticizes onto whatever is the last word in the noun phrase, in this case the verb of a relative clause modifying the noun.

(17) náá ni [pét-i taa bé-mo ] tók
1SG.PERF give [man-FOCUS 3SG.PERF come.DEF] mush
‘I gave mush to the man who came’

The term “article” is often restricted to words that vary for definiteness or specificity. However, the term is naturally applied to words in some languages which are obligatory in noun phrases and which code grammatical features of the noun phrase other than definiteness. For example, Ilocano (Rubino 2000, pc), an Austronesian language of the Philippines, has a set of eight words that vary for number, for case (core versus oblique) and for whether the noun they occur with is a common noun or a proper noun. In (18a), the noun Maria occurs with the article ni, which is used with singular core (subject or object) noun phrases with proper nouns; in (18b), babái “girl” occurs with the article ti, which is used with singular core noun phrases with common nouns; and also in (18b), the noun madióngan “mah jong parlour” occurs with the article ii, which is used with singular oblique noun phrases with common nouns.

(18) a. nakíta-n-ak [ni Maria]
see-3SG.ERG-1SG.ABS PROPER.CORE.SG Maria
‘Maria saw me’

b. nakíta-n-ak [íi babái [ii madióngan]
see-3SG.ERG-1SG.ABS COMMON.CORE.SG girl COMMON.OBL.SG mah.jong.parlour
‘the girl saw me at the mah jong parlour’
Both of the noun phrases in (18b) are necessarily definite, but not because the articles code definiteness: ti babái ‘the girl’ is definite because syntactic arguments of the verb are always definite in Ilocano, and iti madióngan ‘the mah jong parlour (oblique)’ can be made indefinite by adding maysa nga ‘one’ to yield iti maysa nga madióngan ‘a mah jong parlour (oblique)’; the fact that iti remains when it is indefinite makes clear that iti does not code definiteness. Although these words do not vary for definiteness, what they share with articles in European languages is the fact that they are a set of words which occur with high frequency in noun phrases and which vary for certain grammatical features of the noun phrase, much as articles in European languages often vary not only for definiteness but also for gender, number, and in some languages, case. Under this notion of article, the coding of definiteness is not a defining feature, but simply one of the many grammatical features of noun phrases that articles often code.

In Khasi, a Mon-Khmer language of northeast India, there are four articles (all of which correspond in form to independent pronouns): (i) masculine singular; (ii) feminine singular; (iii) plural; and (iv) diminutive (singular or plural). Some examples are given in (19).

(19) a. ka khmat
    FEM eye
    ‘an/the eye’

b. ÷uu bnaay
    MASC moon
    ‘the moon’

c. ÷ii khnaay
    DIMIN mouse
    ‘the/a little mouse’

Again, these articles do not code definiteness, but vary for gender, number and size.

A simpler case of articles is found in Kiribatese (Groves, Groves and Jacobs 1985), an Austronesian language of Kiribati in the Pacific, where the articles vary only for number, with a singular one and a plural one, illustrated in (20).

(20) a. xe atiibu
    SG stone
    ‘a stone, the stone’

b. taian atiibu
    PLUR stone
    ‘stones, some stones, the stones’

Again, what these two words in Kiribatese share with the other instances of articles is that noun phrases in Kiribatese normally occur with one of them. The word taian in (20b) can also be called a plural word, as discussed in section 1.5. below.

An even simpler case is found in Koromfe (Rennison 1997), a Niger-Congo language of Burkina Faso and Mali, in which there is an article a , illustrated in (21), which is used with all common nouns except ones already modified by certain other modifiers, like demonstratives and numerals.

(21) do pa [a kë5 hon] [a ùana]
    3SG.HUMAN give [ART woman DEF.HUMAN.SG] [ART millet.PLUR]
    ‘he gives some millet to the woman’

In addition to the general prenominal article a, Koromfe also has a set of postnominal definite articles which vary for number, humanness, and diminutive, illustrated by the human singular definite article bog in (21). This illustrates that a language may have more than one class of words that satisfy the criteria here for what is an article. In fact, in addition to the words mentioned, Koromfe has yet another word that is used to refer back to referents mentioned previously in the discourse, as in (22).
In Jakaltek (Craig 1977), a Mayan language of Guatemala, each noun belongs to one of twenty-one semantic classes, and is always accompanied by the appropriate noun class marker, as in (23).

(23) a. naj sonlom
    CLASS(man) marimba, player
    ‘the marimba player’

b. ix malin
    CLASS(woman) Mary
    ‘Mary’

c. xe’ iiiah
    CLASS(wood) house
    ‘the house’

This construction is distinct from numeral classifiers (see section 1.4 below); Jakaltek also has numeral classifiers, which combine with the numeral and which co-occur with the above class markers, as in (24).

(24) ca-c’off no’ txitam
    two-CLSFR CLASS(animal) pig
    ‘two pigs’

These noun class markers in Jakaltek, although they only code the class a noun belongs to, can be considered a type of article because they are obligatory in noun phrases. Note that the examples in (23) are definite only because they lack the indefinite article; indefinite noun phrases in Jakaltek contain both an indefinite article and a class marker, as in (25).

(25) hune’ xe’ xila
    INDEF CLASS(wood) chair
    ‘a chair’

Again this illustrates how a language can have more than one article-like element within the same noun phrase. Finally, it should be noted that the noun classifiers also function as third person pronouns. In (26), the classifier naj occurs twice, once in the main clause in combination with the noun pet ‘Peter’ and once by itself in the subordinate clause.

(26) xal naj pel chubil chuluj naj hecal
    said CLASS(man) Peter COMP FUT.come CLASS(man) tomorrow
    ‘Peter said that he will come tomorrow’

Some linguists may be hesitant to apply the term ‘article’ to sets of words that code case. The articles in the Ilocano examples in (18) above vary for core versus oblique case and for number, but those in Niuean (Seiter 1980), a Polynesian language, vary for more case distinctions, and do not vary for number, varying only for whether the noun phrase involves a common noun, a proper noun, or a pronoun, with one set for common nouns and a second set for proper nouns and pronouns, as in (27).

(27) a. ne tamate [he tagata tane] [e puaka]
    PAST kill [ERG.COMM person male] [ABS.COMM pig]
    ‘a man killed a pig’
b. takafaga hololoa [e au] [e tau luke]
   hunt frequently [ERG.PRO 1SG] [ABS.COMM PLUR pigeon]
   “I frequently hunt pigeons”

These case marking words in Niuean differ from the other words I have called articles in that case seems to be their primary function; the role of common nouns versus proper nouns and pronouns might just be seen as factors that determine which form of the case marker is used. A further way in which they are different from articles is that they occur with independent pronouns, as in e au ‘1SG, ERGATIVE’, as in (27b). Note also that they co-occur with other article-like words, like the plural word tau in (27b) and the indefinite article taha, as illustrated in (28).

(28) ne liu kitia foki [he taha tama fifine] [a koe]
   PAST return see also [ERG.COMM INDEF child female] [ABS.PRO 2SG]
   ‘a little girl saw you once again’

It is assumed here that whether one chooses to call these words in Niuean articles or something else is simply a terminological issue.

Languages vary in whether articles occur with proper nouns. While it is perhaps more common for proper nouns to occur without articles, in some languages they do occur with an article. The examples above in (13b) from Futuna-Aniwa, in (18a) from Ilocano, and in (23b) and (26) from Jakaltek illustrate proper nouns occurring with an article. The same is true in Modern Greek (Joseph and Philippaki-Warburton 1987), as in (29), where the definite article also varies for case.

(29) [o jánis] stékete brosā apó [ton pétro]
   [the.NOM John.NOM] stand.3SG front from [the.ACC Peter.ACC]
   ‘John is standing in front of Peter’

1.2 The notion of “determiner”

Many linguists use the term “determiner” for definite and indefinite articles, as well as other words like demonstratives. However, this term is probably best reserved for languages like English in which there are words which articles do not co-occur with, like demonstratives and possessive words (cf. *the my book, *the this book); we can use the term “determiner” to denote the set of such words that occur in the same position in the noun phrase and do not co-occur with each other in such a language. But there are many languages in which articles (or at least definite articles) freely co-occur with demonstratives and possessive words, as in (8b) above from Takia and (10) from Tidore. Similarly, the example in (30) illustrates a definite article and demonstrative co-occurring in Koyra Chiini (Heath 1999), a Songhay language spoken in Mali.

(30) har woo di yo
    man DEM DEF PLUR
    ‘these/those two men’

Similarly, (31) from Engenni (Thomas 1978), a Niger-Congo language of Nigeria, shows a possessive word, a demonstrative, and a definite article all co-occurring with each other.

(31) ani wò ãka nà
    wife 2SG.POSS that the
    ‘that wife of yours’

Even in some languages in which demonstratives and articles do not normally co-occur, the two may occur in different positions within the noun phrase. For example, in Urak Lawoi
(Hogan 1988), an Austronesian language of Thailand, the demonstrative occurs after the noun, as in (32a), while the definite article occurs before the noun, as in (32b).

(32)  
\begin{align*}
a. \text{ rumah besal itu} \\
\text{house big that} \\
\text{‘that big house’}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
b. \text{ koq nanaq} \\
\text{DEF children} \\
\text{‘the children’}
\end{align*}

In such languages in which definite articles co-occur with demonstratives or occur in different positions in the noun phrase, there is little justification for a grammatical notion of determiner, unless one restricts it to articles; it is misleading to apply the term to demonstratives in such languages.

1.3. Demonstratives

While articles are found in only some languages, all languages appear to have words that we can call demonstratives. There are two types of demonstratives: demonstrative pronouns, which occur by themselves as noun phrases, as in (33a), and demonstrative modifiers of nouns (traditionally called demonstrative adjectives), as in (33b).

(33)  
\begin{align*}
a. \text{ This is a great book.} \\
\text{b. [This book] is great.}
\end{align*}

Languages differ as to whether demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative modifiers take the same form: in English, they do, while in Awa Pit (Curnow 1997), a Barbacoan language spoken around the Ecuador-Colombia border, they do not: the demonstrative modifiers are an ‘this’ and sun ‘that’, while the demonstrative pronouns are ana ‘this’ and suna ‘that’.

There are two features that characterize demonstratives in most languages. The first is that they can be used to draw the hearer’s attention to something in the perceptual space of the speaker and hearer, possibly with a gesture indicating the approximate location of the referent. The second is that they involve at least a two-way contrast in terms of distance from the speaker, such as English this and that. A few languages have demonstrative words that have only the first of these two features. For example, in French the demonstrative ce, as in (34a) is neutral with respect to distance, although a distinction in terms of distance is available by supplementing ce with postnominal -ci or -là, as in (34b) and (34c).

(34)  
\begin{align*}
a. \text{ ce livre} \\
\text{DEM book} \\
\text{‘this/that book’}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
b. \text{ ce livre-ci} \\
\text{DEM book-here} \\
\text{‘this book’}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
c. \text{ ce livre-là} \\
\text{DEM book-there} \\
\text{‘that book’}
\end{align*}

The French construction in (34c) can be seen as a kind of double demonstrative. In some languages, double demonstratives are normal if not obligatory. For example, in Milang (Tayeng 1976), a Tibeto-Burman language of northeast India, the same demonstrative word occurs twice, once before the noun, and once after the noun.
(35) yo miu yo
this boy this
‘this boy’

The situation is similar in Nishi (Hamilton 1900), another Tibeto-Burman language of northeast India, as in (36), except that the prenominal demonstrative is identical to the demonstrative adverb for ‘here’ or ‘there’, somewhat analogous to English ‘this book here’, except that this is the normal way to express demonstratives in Nishi.

(36) sā mindui sî
here buffalo this
‘this buffalo’

While most languages have demonstrative words that directly modify nouns, a few languages require that they be placed in relative clauses. This is the case for the distal demonstrative in Sahidic Coptic (Lambdin 1983), an Afro-Asiatic language once spoken in Egypt: while the proximal demonstrative is a clitic preceding the noun, as in (37a), the distal demonstrative follows with the relative word, as in (37b).

(37) a. pei-rome
this-man
‘this man’

b. p-rome [et mmau ]
DEF-man [REL that]
‘that man’ (literally ‘the man that is that’)

1.4. Numerals

There are two sorts of numeral words that occur as modifiers of nouns. One of these is cardinal numerals, words that indicate how many referents the noun phrase denotes, as in English three books. These contrast with ordinal numerals, which identify a referent in terms of its order with respect to other referents, as in English the third book. Ordinal numerals are most commonly derived from cardinal numerals, as illustrated by the English suffix -th (six vs. sixth) and the prefix viña- (made ‘four’, viñamade ‘fourth’) in Roviana (Corston-Oliver 2002), an Austronesian language of the Solomon Islands. The lower ordinal numerals are occasionally suppletively related to their corresponding cardinal numerals, as with English first and second.

Cardinal and ordinal numerals often differ in their syntax. For example, in Karo Batak (Woollams 1996), cardinal numerals normally precede the noun, as in (38a), while ordinal numerals follow the noun, as in (38b).

(38) a. relu wari
three days
‘three days’

b. lubang pelimaken
hole fifth
‘the fifth hole’

Some languages express ordinal numerals with a periphrastic construction. In Khasi (Rabel 1961), a Mon-Khmer language of northeast India, cardinal numerals occur with classifiers as premodifiers of the noun, as in (39a), while the equivalent of ordinal numerals is expressed by treating the relevant cardinal numeral as a verb and placing it in a relative clause modifying the noun, as in (39b).

(39) a. relu wari
three days
‘three days’

b. lubang pelimaken
hole fifth
‘the fifth hole’
In many languages, cardinal numerals cannot directly modify nouns but must be accompanied by a numeral classifier, as in (39a) from Khasi and (40) from Dong (Long and Zheng 1998), a Tai-Kadai language spoken in China.

(39) a. ?aar tlii kii ksew
two CLSFR PLUR dog
‘two dogs’

b. ?uuni?uu long ?uu ba laay
this is he REL three
‘this is the third’ (more literally: ‘this is he who is three’)

(40) a. ʔi 55 ði 31 ñ√n 212
one CLSFR man
‘one man’

b. ja 212 ðo˝ 55 mai 31
two CLSFR tree
‘two trees’

The classifier ði 55 and ðo˝ 55 in (40) are two of five semantically-based classifiers in Dong that depend on the meaning of the noun. The five classes associated with the classifiers are (i) people; (ii) animals; (iii) plants; (iv) upper outer garments; and (v) long thin things. The classifier ði 55 in (40a) is the classifier associated with people, while ðo˝ 55 in (40b) is the one associated with plants. There are also a couple of general classifiers that do not have any particular semantics associated with them.

In a few languages, numerals must occur with an invariant word, which is strictly speaking not a classifier (since there is only one of them), but which otherwise functions like a classifier in that its presence is required if the numeral is modifying a noun. An example of this is the word e (glossed ‘NUM’ for ‘number marker’) in Gela (Crowley 2002), an Austronesian language of the Solomon Islands, as in (41).

(41) e tolu na bolo
NUM three ART pig
‘three pigs’

There is a question in some languages whether the numeral modifies the noun or whether it is better to view the numeral as the head and the noun as modifier. This view is often suggested for languages with numeral classifiers; under this view the numeral modifies the classifier and the numeral plus classifier serves as head, with the noun as modifier. Such an analysis also suggests itself for some languages without numeral classifiers. In Rif Berber (Kossmann 2000), spoken in Morocco, most modifiers follow the noun, but numerals precede, as in (42a); but the construction they occur in is the same as the genitive construction, illustrated in (42b), suggesting that the numeral is the head.

(42) a. ðala [n tawrar]
three [GEN hill]
‘three hills’

b. axxam [n woryaz]
house [GEN man]
‘the man’s house’
This construction is reminiscent of English *three of the hills*, except that the construction in (42a) does not have to have partitive meaning. In Turkish (Kornfilt 1997), the numeral can either precede the noun as a modifier, as in (43a), or follow with partitive meaning, as in (43b).

(43) a. üç elma  
three apple  
‘three apples’

b. elma-lar-ın üç-ü  
apple-PLUR-GEN three-3SG  
‘three of the apples’

The partitive structure in (43b), with genitive case on the word for ‘apple’ and a third person possessive suffix on the word for ‘three’, is identical to the normal genitive construction in Turkish, illustrated in (95) below, suggesting that the numeral should be viewed as the head.

There are a number of other words in most languages which are semantically like cardinal numerals in being quantifying words, which behave like cardinal numerals in most languages, but which in some languages do not. This includes words meaning ‘many’, ‘much’, ‘few’, ‘all’, ‘every’, and ‘some’. In English, for example, the word *all* precedes a determiner (*all the men*), while numerals follow the determiner (*the three men*). Similarly, while the numeral precedes the noun in Basque, as in (44a), the words for ‘all’, ‘some’, and ‘many’ follow the noun, as illustrated in (44b).

(44) a. bi esku  
two hand  
‘two hands’

b. armiarna-sare asko  
spider-web many  
‘many spider webs’

In Kurdish, numerals precede the noun, but the word for ‘many’ follows the noun.

1.5. Plural words

Some languages have words whose meaning is similar to that of plural affixes in other languages, but which are separate words; such words can be called plural words, as in (45) from Koyra Chiini (Heath 1999) and (46) from Arop-Lokep (D’Jernes 2002), an Austronesian language of Papua New Guinea.

(45) haw di yo  
cow DEF PLUR  
‘the cows’

(46) di ookoo  
PLUR canoe  
‘the canoes’

In Lenakel (Lynch 1978), an Austronesian language of Vanuatu, there is not only a plural word, as in (47a), but also a dual word as in (47b).

(47) a. kuri mii miin akan  
dog PLUR that  
‘those dogs’
b. pera-suas mi1
woman-small DUAL
‘the two girls’

The fact that the dual word is distinct from the numeral for ‘two’ is illustrated by the example in (48), which contains both the dual word and the numeral for ‘two’.

(48) uu-s mi1 kiu ka
man DUAL two that
‘those two men’

Plural words can often be viewed as a type of article, which vary only for number. The examples in (20) above from Kiribatese illustrate a singular word and a plural word, which I suggest be viewed as articles, since noun phrases require one of them. We can also distinguish “pure” plural words, which only code plurality, from articles that code number in addition to other semantic or grammatical features of the noun phrase, in which these articles are the sole indication of number in noun phrases. For example, in Siar (Ross 2002b), an Austronesian language of Papua New Guinea, the sole indication of plurality are articles which also vary for animacy and specificity. For example, the article tok in (49) codes plurality and nonspecificity with inanimate nouns.

(49) lau besen a yan [tok un]
I not-yet 1SG eat [PLURAL.NONSPEC.INAN banana]
‘I haven’t eaten any bananas’

In some languages, the plural word is distinct from other words that can be called articles. In Arosi, an Austronesian language of the Solomon Islands, the plural word is distinct from the articles, which vary for common versus proper noun, subject versus nonsubject, and definite versus indefinite, illustrated in (50).

(50) na mwani he’u
COMMON.DEF.SUBJ PLUR star
‘the stars’

Languages with plural words vary as to whether the plural word belongs to the same category as numerals. In some languages, it occurs in the same position in the noun phrase as numerals and does not co-occur with a numeral. This is the case in Bawm (Reichle 1981), a Tibeto-Burman language of Bangladesh, in which the numeral and the plural word follow adjectives and precede demonstratives modifying a noun. In contrast, in Jakaltek (Craig 1977), the plural word co-occurs with the numeral, as in (51).

(51) cau-an heb naj winaj
two-CLSFR PLUR CLASS man
‘two men’

In some languages, the plural word is a clitic that attaches in some fixed position within the noun phrase. In Margi (Hoffman 1963), a Chadic language of Nigeria, the plural clitic follows postnominal adjectives, relative clauses, and genitives, but precedes the definite marker and demonstratives. In (52), it attaches to the genitive noun ñji ‘God’, but precedes the demonstrative kų.

(52) [ndär gó ñji]-‘yär kų
[word of God]-PLUR this
‘these words of God’
1.6. Adjectives

There are two senses in which linguists use the term “adjective”. On its first usage, it is used semantically to denote a set of words on the basis of their meaning, regardless of their grammatical properties in particular languages. On its second usage it is used as a label for a word class in a particular language defined by grammatical characteristics which distinguish it from other words in that language. On the first of these, it is used as a label for words that are descriptive words that denote what some people call properties, such as size and colour, though in practice it is used for words with meanings corresponding to words traditionally called adjectives in English, with meanings like “big”, “red”, “good”, “long”, and “fast”. The term is also sometimes used more generally to include any modifier of nouns, including demonstratives and numerals, but this usage is now less common; on this older usage, the words that are here called adjectives were often called descriptive adjectives.

In order to keep separate these two uses of the term, I will use the expression “semantic adjectives” to denote words that are adjectives in the first of the two senses described above. Languages differ in the extent to which semantic adjectives form a distinct word class, with grammatical characteristics which distinguish them from other words in the language. In many languages, semantic adjectives are grammatically verbs, with the same morphology and syntax as other verbs. For example, the word for ‘tall’ in Ojibwa (Rich Rhodes, p.c.), an Algonquian language of eastern North America, occurs with the same subject prefix in (53a) as the word for ‘sing’ in (53b).

(53) a. n- ginooz
   1SG-tall
   ‘I am tall’

b. n- nagam
   1SG-sing
   ‘I am singing’

These two words also inflect in the same way when they modify a noun, as in (54), occurring with a relativizing prefix and a subject suffix.

(54) a. nini e- gnoozi- d
   man REL -tall-3SG
   ‘a tall man’

b. nini e- ngamo- d
   man REL -sing-3SG
   ‘a man who is singing’

In such languages, when semantic adjectives modify nouns, they are really relative clauses, albeit simple relative clauses consisting of a single word. But they are not grammatically distinct from relative clauses consisting of only a verb denoting an action.

In many languages, semantic adjectives are verbs, because they share properties with other verbs, but nevertheless form a distinct subclass of verbs because they differ from other verbs in other respects. For example, in Chemehuevi (Press 1980), a Uto-Aztecan language of the western United States, semantic adjectives require participial suffixes when modifying nouns, just like clear instances of verbs; however, they differ from other verbs in that other verbs must occur with a demonstrative when modifying a noun prenominally, as in (55a), while semantic adjectives do not have to, as illustrated in (55b).

(55) a. [nukwi-c aŋ aiapatjap a] pa? a-j
    [run-PTCL that boy] tall-PRES
    ‘the running boy is tall’
b. [paʔa-ni-m aipac] nukwi-j
   [tall-PTCPL-ANIM boy] run-PRES
   "the tall boy is running"

Note that semantic adjectives in Chemehuevi also differ from other verbs in that they require an animate suffix (which takes the form \(-m\) in (55b)) when they are modifying an animate noun; with nonadjectival verbs, this suffix is only used when the verb is modifying a plural animate noun. In languages in which semantic adjectives form a subclass of verbs, they are often called "stative verbs", although one can equally well call them "adjectival verbs" or even just "adjectives", with the understanding that in some languages, adjectives are a subclass of verbs.

Similarly, semantic adjectives in Mupun (Frajzyngier 1993), resemble verbs in various ways, justifying treating them as a subclass of verbs. For example, they occur with a set of pronominal subject morphemes, which are otherwise associated with verbs as illustrated by the first person singular subject prefix \(n\)- in (56a).

(56) a. \(n\)-fe]\(l\)
   1SG-strong
   'I am strong'

b. \(n\)-sam
   1SG-sleep
   'I slept'

Like other verbs, they occur with relative markers when they modify a noun, but while other verbs require a pronominal subject morpheme when they modify a noun, semantic adjectives do not occur with a pronominal subject morpheme. Thus, in (57a), the semantic adjective \(c\)i 'different' occurs with the relative marker \(d\)e, but without the third person singular masculine subject pronoun \(w\)u, which occurs with the nonadjectival verb in (57b).

(57) a. n-dem [ngwe \(d\)e \(c\)i]
   1SG-like [man REL different]
   'I like a different man'

b. n-dem [ngwe \(d\)e \(wu\) cii]
   1SG-like [man REL 3SG.MASC refuse]
   'I like a man who refuses'

In some languages, semantic adjectives share characteristics with nouns rather than with verbs. This is true for many languages in Europe. For example in Latin, adjectives inflect for number and case, as in (58) and the morphology is the same as that for nouns.

(58) a. \[bon-a\] terr-a
   [good-FEM.NOM.SG land-FEM.NOM.SG]
   est
   'it is good land'

b. \[bon-am\] terr-am]
   [good-FEM.ACC.SG land-FEM.ACC.SG]
   vidi
   'I saw good land'

In other respects, however, they are distinct from nouns. For example, adjectives inflect for all three genders, whereas nouns have inherent gender. And adjectives can modify nouns (as in (58)), agreeing in case, number and gender with the noun they modify, something nouns cannot do. When a noun modifies another noun in Latin, it must occur in the genitive case and it inflects for its own gender and number, as illustrated by \(vin\)\(^{-}\) "wine" in (59).

(59) inopi-a \[vin-\]
    shortage-FEM.NOM.SG wine-NEUT.GEN.SG
    'a wine shortage'
The shared features, however, justify recognizing them as a distinct subclass of nouns (or, equivalently, to posit a higher level category like “nominal” that encompasses both nouns and adjectives). Languages like English, in which adjectives share few characteristics with either nouns or verbs, are a minority.

In some languages, semantic adjectives divide into different word classes in terms of their grammatical characteristics. In Ju'can (Dickens 1992), a Northern Khoisan language, some semantic adjectives belong to a distinct word class of adjectives (though they share plural morphology with nouns), while others are verbs. Those which are in the separate adjective class simply follow the noun when they modify it, as in (60a). In contrast, those which are verbs are formally relative clauses, as in (60b), indicated by the relative marker -à, which appears as a clitic on the word preceding the relative clause (most commonly the head noun), parallel to (60c).

(60) a. tju zer
   house new
   ‘a new house’

b. jü-à glaoh
   person-REL strong
   ‘a strong person’

c. jü-à [kú dcaá mi tsísi]
   person-REL [IMPERF steal 1SG thing]
   ‘the person who is stealing my things’

The situation is similar in Ambai (Silzer 1983), an Austronesian language spoken in West Papua in Indonesia: there is a small closed class of adjectives which do not inflect, as in (61a), while most semantic adjectives are verbs. The example in (61a) illustrates a noninflecting adjective, while (61b) illustrates a semantic adjective that is grammatically a verb, with a third person singular subject prefix, occurring formally as a relative clause, exactly parallel to the relative clause in (61c).

(61) a. inontarai fitba
   person large
   ‘a large person’

b. inontarai d-edai
   person 3SG-tall
   ‘a tall person’

c. inontarai d-ausai
   person 3SG-climb
   ‘the person who climbed’

In Koromfe (Rennison 1997), some semantic adjectives are nouns while others are verbs, and the two occur in different positions within the noun phrase, the former immediately after the noun, the latter after adjectival nouns and numerals. In (62), for example, the words jëunjë ‘small’ and bënë ‘black’ are nouns and precede tāaj ‘three’, while tam ‘lost’ is a verb and follows the numeral.

(62) lugãni jëunjë bënë tāaj tam hën
    cat.PLUR small.PLUR black.PLUR three lost DEF.NON.HUMAN.PLUR
    ‘those three small lost black cats’

In Nkore-Kiga (Taylor 1985), a Bantu language spoken in Uganda, some semantic adjectives exhibit nominal properties, illustrated by onunugi ‘good’ in (62a), which, like nouns, occurs with a noun class prefix, and some are verbs, illustrated by erikweer ‘white’ in (63b), which occurs with a relativizing prefix and a tense-aspect prefix, both features of verbs.
(63) a. omu-ntu
    omu-rungi
    NOUN.CLASS-person NOUN.CLASS-good
    "the good person"

b. esaati e-rikw-era
    shirt REL-PRES.CONT-white
    "a white shirt"

It should be noted that there are other meanings of semantic adjectives in Nkore-Kiga which are expressed by nouns, where the noun has a meaning corresponding to that of an abstract noun in English. In the construction in (64), the noun amaani ‘strength’ corresponds more closely to the English noun strength than to the adjective strong, and occurs as object of a preposition, so that a more literal translation might be ‘a young man of strength’.

(64) omutsigazi w=amaani
    young.man of=strength
    ‘a strong young man’

In Ungarinjin (Rumsey 1982), a Wororan language spoken in northern Australia, some semantic adjectives bear prefixes that inflect for gender, person and number, while others do not. The set of prefixes that occur with the former is the same as the set of possessive prefixes used with body part nouns, but their meaning is different, so this provides little argument for treating these semantic adjectives as nouns. Hence there are apparently two distinct classes of semantic adjectives in Ungarinjin, neither of which is a subclass of verbs or nouns. The example in (65a) illustrates one of the noninflecting adjectives while (65b) illustrates one of the prefixing adjectives.

(65) a. gan ma´gu djomali
    yam big
    ‘big yam’

b. ˝abun wu-niya˝ari
    water NOUN.CLASS-good
    ‘good water’

Semantic adjectives occasionally combine with modifiers to form phrases. Modifiers of adjectives may be degree words or various sorts of phrases, as in the examples in (66) from Malayalam (Asher and Kumari 1997), a Dravidian language spoken in southern India.

(66) a. [parama dayaaluvaaya] iiÍvaran
    very merciful God
    ‘a very merciful God’

b. [e ne-kkal valiya] manu˝yan
    1SG.ACC-than big man
    ‘a man bigger than me’

Some languages do not permit adjectives with modifiers to directly modify nouns, but require that they be expressed by a relative clause. This is illustrated for Indonesian (Sneddon 1996) in (67): in (67a), the simple adjective immediately follows the noun, without additional marking, while in (67b) the adjective is modified by a degree word terlalu ‘too’, and must be expressed as a relative clause, with the relative marker yang.

(67) a. rumah besar
    house big
    ‘a big house’
b. jas [yang sertahi besar]  
  jacket [REL. too big]  
  "a jacket which is too big"

Note that even English prefers to place the adjective phrase in a relative clause, if it involves the degree word too, as illustrated in (68).

(68) a. ?*a too big jacket  
b. a jacket which is too big

In Rif Berber (Kossmann 2000), an adjective can only modify a noun if the noun phrase is interpreted as definite, as in (69a); if the noun phrase is indefinite, the adjective must be put in a relative clause, as in (69b) (where the nonverbal copula indicates that it is a relative clause).

(69) a. ithramün imazzyanän  
  boy.PLUR small  
  "the small boys"  
b. iqsasudän [d imaqquwanän]  
  wood COP large  
  "large pieces of wood"

Another way in which adjectives do not directly modify nouns is found in Siar (Ross 2002b). When an adjective accompanies a noun in Siar, both the adjective and the noun occur with an article (which varies for number, specificity and noun class) and a ligature word connects the two constituents, as in (70).

(70) [ep wakak] in [ep lamas]  
  [SG.SPEC.NC1 good] LIG [SG.SPEC.NC1 coconut.palm]  
  "a good coconut palm"

Such constructions might be analysed as involving two noun phrases.

In some languages, semantic adjectives do not modify nouns, even in the sense of occurring in a relative clause modifying a noun. In the translation equivalents of English noun phrases with an adjective modifying a noun, the semantic adjective is actually the predicate of a so-called internally-headed relative clause, and the noun (or noun phrase) is subject of that predicate. See examples and discussion in section 3.2 below.

1.7. Nouns Used As Modifiers

The most common way in which nouns occur as modifiers of nouns is in genitive constructions, in which it is really a noun phrase rather than just a noun that is modifying the head noun. These are discussed in section 2.1 below. However, some, but not all, languages allow nouns to modify nouns without possessive meaning. English allows this in phrases like music teacher. Similarly, in Bashkir (Poppe 1964), a Turkic language spoken in Russia, a noun can modify a noun as a possessor, in which case it is marked in the genitive case, as in (71a), or with some nonpossessive meaning, in which case it is not case-marked, as in (71b).

(71) a. gafuri-ðen kitabî  
  Gafuri-GEN book  
  "Gafuri’s book, i.e. the book belonging to Gafuri"
Constructions in which a noun directly modifies another noun are sometimes called compounds. It is important, however, to distinguish two types of constructions which are called compounds, namely lexical compounds, in which the compound has an ideosyncratic meaning not predictable from the meaning of the component parts as compared with syntactic compounds, in which one noun is modifying a second noun in a productive syntactic construction. For example, English boy scout is a lexical compound, while music teacher is a syntactic compound. The former behaves like a single word, while the latter is a type of phrase.

1.8. Locative Adverbs

Locative demonstratives, words whose basic function is adverbial, like ‘here’ and ‘there’ in English, can sometimes modify nouns as well, as in English the food here, and in (72) from Amele (Roberts 1987).

(72) jobon ceheleg / cuhulug
village up.there / down.there
‘the village up there / down there’

In some languages, when they modify nouns, the locative demonstratives have the meaning ‘from here, from there’ when they modify nouns, as in Ngiti (Kutsch Lojenga 1994) illustrated in (73).

(73) ma mú ni [àwú ngbángba]
1SG 1SG.know.PERF.PRES [there child]
‘I know the child from there’

1.9. Interrogative modifiers

For various semantic types of modifiers of nouns, there are corresponding interrogative expressions, as illustrated for English by the pairs of noun phrases in (74), with the interrogative expressions illustrated on the left and their corresponding noninterrogative expressions illustrated on the right.

(74) which book this book
what sort of book a good book
how many books three books
whose book my book

Languages vary in the extent to which they have single words for expressing these interrogative meanings: note the multi-word English expressions how many and what sort of. In some languages, these meanings are expressed by single words. For example, ‘how many’ is expressed by a single word in Ambulas (Wilson 1980), a Sepik-Ramu language of Papua New Guinea, as illustrated in (75a), and ‘what sort of’ is expressed by a single word in Tsova-Tush (Holisky and Gagua 1994), a Nakh-Daghestanian language of the Caucasus region of Russia, as illustrated in (75b)

(75) a. baálé yapap
pig how.many
‘how many pigs’
b. [molun k'nat] Va e, gažen-i le mosîn?
[what.sort boy] is 3SG good-Q or bad
‘What sort of boy is he, good or bad?’

Words or expressions meaning ‘how many’ often occur with mass nouns with the meaning ‘how much’, as illustrated in (76) by the word mənà from Miya (Schuh 1998), a Chadic language of Nigeria.

(76) a. sòba mənà
    person.PLUR how.many
    ‘how many people’

b. shùw mənà
    oil how.much
    ‘how much oil’

Such interrogative expressions are generally treated grammatically like their corresponding noninterrogative expressions. For example, the postnominal position of yagap ‘how many’ in the Ambulas example in (75a) above mirrors the postnominal position of numerals in this language, as illustrated in (77).

(77) gaan kupuk
    night three
    ‘three nights’

Similarly, in (78), the interrogative word njiza ‘how many’ in Gela (Crowley 2002) occurs before the noun, preceded by the numeral marker e and followed by the article na, exactly like a numeral, as in (41) above.

(78) e njiza na kake
    NUM how.many ART taro
    ‘how many taro’

Occasionally, however, languages treat interrogative words differently from their corresponding non-interrogative words. For example, in Turkana (Dimmendaal 1983), a Nilotic language of Kenya, numerals follow the noun, as in (79a), but the expression for ‘how many’ precedes the noun, as in (79b).

(79) a. ɲa-kine-i' njarey`
    PL-goat-PL two
    ‘two goats’

b. njai nj-i-kepj
    how.many PL-bird
    ‘how many birds’

1.10. Miscellaneous noun modifiers

There are a number of meanings that are often represented by words that modify nouns but often with rather idiosyncratic grammatical properties. These include quantifying words, ones meaning ‘all’, ‘every’, ‘some’, ‘many’, as well as words meaning ‘another’, ‘different’, ‘same’, ‘only’ and ‘even’. As noted above, the word all in English precedes determiners (all the men), a property shared only by both (both the men). In Burushaski (Lorimer 1935), a language isolate of Pakistan, all modifiers of nouns precede the noun except for the words meaning ‘all’ and ‘both’, which follow the noun. In Malayalam (Asher and Kumari 1997), all modifiers precede the noun, except for those meaning ‘all’, ‘only’, and ‘even’. In Dholuo
(Omondi 1982), a Nilotic language spoken in Kenya, all modifiers follow the noun, except for a diminutive particle. In Kinyarwanda (Hurel 1959), a Bantu language spoken in Rwanda, the word for “other” is the only word other than demonstratives that can precede the noun, though unlike demonstratives, it can also follow the noun.

2. Complex noun phrases

2.1. Genitive or possessive constructions

2.1.1. Genitive constructions with nominal possessors

The terms “genitive” and “possessive” are both used for constructions in which a noun occurs with another noun phrase denoting a possessor, as in English London’s mayor or the mayor of London, or the example in (80) from Kayardild (Evans 1995).

(80) dangka-karra dulk
     man-GEN country
     ‘the man’s country’

The term “possessive” is also applied sometimes to two other types of constructions, where possession is predicated at the clause level, illustrated by English She has three children and That book is mine; for that reason, the term “genitive construction” (rather than “possessive”) will be used here for a noun phrase construction of the sort illustrated in (80). The modifying noun phrase in a genitive construction (dangkakarra in 80) can be called either the genitive noun phrase or the possessor. The noun that is modified by the genitive noun phrase can be called the head noun or the possessed noun.

The range of meanings associated with genitive constructions is much broader than the word “possession” might suggest. It includes kinship relations (John’s sister), part-whole relations (John’s hand, the bottom of the basket), possession or ownership (John’s sandwich), and various abstract relations (John’s birthday, the population of London, the mayor of London, the destruction of the city, the arrival of the enemy, etc.). While some languages use different constructions for different types of genitive relationships (see section 2.1.4 below), it is very common for languages to use the same construction for all of these relationships.

There are considerable differences among genitive constructions crosslinguistically. One difference is that some languages mark the possessor while other languages mark the possessed noun. For example, in (81) from Hua (Haiman 1980), a Trans-New Guinea language, it is the possessor which is marked, occurring in the genitive case.

(81) de-ma’ fu
     man-GEN pig
     ‘the man’s pig’

In contrast, in Cree (Ellis 1983), an Algonquian language spoken in Canada, the possessor is unmarked, while the possessed noun occurs with a possessive prefix, representing the person and number of the possessor, as in (82).

(82) c a •n o-cÌ •ma •n
     John 3SG.POSS -canoe
     ‘John’s canoe’

It is important not to confuse the two sorts of affixes in (81) and (82). The genitive affix in (81) is a case affix and signals that the possessor noun it occurs with is functioning as a possessor. The possessive affix in (82), in contrast, is a pronominal morpheme, varying for pronominal features of the possessor. The difference is analogous to the difference between two different sorts of affixes that one might call “subject affixes”, namely a subject case affix
on a noun functioning as subject, and subject agreement on a verb, agreeing in person and number with the subject. Genitive affixes are a form of dependent-marking, since the possessor is a grammatical dependent of the head noun, while possessive affixes are a form of head-marking, since they occur on the head noun. Linguists occasionally employ the term “possessive affix” for genitive affixes, but since such usage is potentially confusing, it is best avoided.

Note that in languages with possessive affixes, the possessor noun phrase can generally be left out, as in (83) from Cree, in which case the noun phrase is interpreted as having a pronominal possessor.

(83) o-cɪmɪ
3SG.POSS-canoē
“his canoe”

See section 2.1.2 below for further discussion of pronominal possessors.

Some languages employ a construction in which the morphological marking occurs on the possessed noun, but unlike Cree, the marking does not indicate properties of the possessor but simply indicates that the possessed noun is possessed. For example, in Haida (Swanton 1911), a language spoken off the west coast of Canada, the possessed noun occurs with a suffix -ga, regardless of the person and number of the possessor, as illustrated in (84).

(84) a. Wάnagá\'n\'gɪ\'t\'ga
Wanagan son-POSS\'D
“Wanagan’s son”
b. dɪ\g\'n\'ga
1SG father-POSS\'D
“my father”

In addition to the two constructions illustrated in (81) and (82), a third common type of construction is one in which the possessor is marked with an adposition, as illustrated by the English preposition of in the mayor of London, and by the postposition pa in (85) from Rumu (Petterson 1999), a Trans-New Guinea language.

(85) [hei akö pa] ma\'ë
[word that GEN] meaning
“the meaning of that word”

Since the function of the adposition is like that of a genitive case affix and since the adposition forms a constituent with the possessor, this type of construction involves a form of dependent marking.

Some languages employ a construction with a morpheme which is intermediate between a genitive case affix and a genitive adposition, where the genitive morpheme is a clitic that attaches to the last (or first) word in the noun phrase, as illustrated by the English genitive morpheme spelled 's, as in (86), or the clitic -gat in (87) from Nabak (Fabian, Fabian and Waters 1998), a Trans-New Guinea language spoken in Papua New Guinea.

(86) a. [the Queen of England]’s crown
b. [a friend of mine]’s car

(87) [an ʻeman]-gat mka
[man big]-GEN house
“the big man’s house”

In many languages in which the genitive construction involves a word that intervenes between the possessor and the possessed noun, it is not obvious that this word is an adposition, and in some cases, there is reason to say that it is not an adposition. For example, in Mandarin Chinese (Li and Thompson 1981), the word de occurs between the possessor and
the possessed noun, as in (88a), but it occurs more generally with other modifiers of nouns as well, such as relative clauses, as in (88b) (hence the gloss ‘LINK’).

(88) a. tùzi de ěrduō
rabbit LINK ear
‘a rabbit’s ear’

b. [Zhāngsān mǎi de] qīchē
[Zhangsan buy LINK] car
‘the car that Zhangsan bought’

There are still other languages in which a word intervenes between the possessor and possessed noun which is not an adposition but a pronominal word varying for features of the possessor, as in (89) from Loniu (Hamel 1994), an Austronesian language of Papua New Guinea.

(89) pāramāiy pihīn
father 3SG.POSS woman
‘the woman’s father’

This type of construction is probably best viewed as a variant of the head-marking construction in Cree, illustrated in (82) above, except that the pronominal morpheme is a separate word in Loniu rather than an affix.

In languages in which there is a separate word marking a genitive construction, the word typically intervenes between the possessor and the possessed noun, as in (85), (88), (89) and English the mayor of London. Occasionally, however, it occurs outside the two nouns, as in (90) from Moru (Tucker and Bryan 1966), a Central Sudanic language spoken in Sudan.

(90) drij [tswē r5]
head tree of
‘the head (i.e. top) of the tree’

If the word is an adposition, it will occur adjacent to the possessor, as in (90); but if it is a pronominal word, it will typically occur adjacent to the possessed noun, as in (91) from Kobon (Davies 1981), a Trans-New Guinea language, where the pronoun nipe is agreeing in person and number with the possessor nībi yad ‘my wife’.

(91) nībi yad nī nipe
wife 1SG.POSS son 3SG.POSS
‘my wife’s son’

However, in (92) from Kamoro (Boelaars 1950), another Trans-New Guinea language, the pronoun occurs adjacent to the possessor and is separated from the possessed noun.

(92) kamē: nātī acra-rā
house headman 3SG-GEN
‘the house of the headman’

A further common type of genitive construction is one with no marking of the relationship at all, where the possessor and possessed noun are simply juxtaposed, as in (93) from Chalcatongo Mixtec (Macaulay 1996), spoken in Mexico, and (94) from Nivkh (Gruzdeva 1998), a language isolate spoken in Russia, in eastern Siberia.

(93) kačinī peōrū
hat Pedro
‘Pedro’s hat’
Note that the two languages in (93) and (94) differ in the order of the two nouns: Chalcatongo employs noun-genitive order in (93), while Nivkh employs genitive-noun order in (94).

Some languages employ a combination of two of the above constructions. For example, Turkish employs both a genitive suffix on the possessor and a possessive suffix on the possessed noun, as in (95).

(95) Ahmed-in ogl-u.
     Ahmet-GEN son-3SG.POSS
     ‘Ahmet’s son’

In Tennet (Randal 1998), a Surmic language spoken in Sudan, there is both a genitive case suffix on the possessor and a linker word that occurs between the possessed noun and the possessor, as in (96).

(96) mana c í ongol-o
     field LINK elephant-GEN
     ‘the elephant’s field’

This same linker is also used with relative clauses, as in (97).

(97) dhúngoc [cí bali ákáti Lohám-i]
     waterbuck [LINK PAST PERF:spear Loham-SUBJ]
     ‘a waterbuck that Loham speared’

2.1.2. Pronominal possessors

In some languages, the construction used for pronominal possessors is the same as that used for nominal possessors (i.e. possessors headed by a noun). For example, in Kodava (Ebert 1996), a Dravidian language spoken in India, both pronominal possessors and nominal possessors take the same genitive case suffix -da, as illustrated in (98), in which the first word is a pronominal possessor of the second word and the second word is a nominal possessor of the third word.

(98) [[lavén-da] appén-da] paliyë mane
     [[3SG.MASC-GEN] father-GEN] old house
     ‘his father’s old house’

Similarly, in Khmer (Cambodian) (Jacob 1968), simple juxtaposition of possessed noun and possessor is used both with nominal possessors, as in (99a), and with pronominal possessors, as in (99b).

(99) a. tü: tâ
     cupboard grandfather
     ‘grandfather’s cupboard’

b. phítsh khnom
     house 1SG
     ‘my house’

However, languages in which nominal and pronominal possessors are treated the same way form a small minority of the world’s languages.
In many languages with some form of dependent marking on nominal possessors, like a genitive case affix or the English clitic 's, there is a distinct morphological class of possessive pronouns, often without a clearly identifiable genitive morpheme. Thus compare English the man's house with my house or your house. (Note that some people restrict the term "possessive pronoun" as it applies to English to words like yours and mine; in this chapter, the term will be applied to the pronominal possessive words that serve as modifiers of nouns.) Similarly, in Yaqui (Dedrick and Casad), a Uto-Aztecan language spoken in northern Mexico, while nominal possessors occur with a suffix -\(\text{-}t\), as in (100a), pronominal possessors involve a distinct set of pronouns, illustrated in (100b).

(100) a. \(\text{Hóan-}t\)\(\text{-}\) huúbi
    \(\text{John-GEN}\) wife
    ‘John’s wife’

b. 'íñ tómi
    \(\text{1SG.POSS}\) money
    ‘my money’

In some languages pronominal possession involves a distinct construction from that used with nominal possession. In French, for example, nominal possession involves placing the possessor after the possessed noun, with the preposition de, as in (101a), while pronominal possession involves a pronominal possessive pronoun that agrees with the possessed noun in gender and number.

(101) a. \(\text{l' e\ }}\) livré \(\text{de}\) Jean
    the.MASC.SG book of John
    ‘John’s book’

b. mon
    \(\text{1SG.POSS.MASC.SG}\) livre
    ‘my book’

The term “possessive adjective” is appropriate for forms like mon in (101b) because of the fact that it agrees in number and gender with the head noun. However, although this sort of construction is common in Indo-European languages, it is relatively uncommon in other language families.

A major source of differences between nominal possession and pronominal possession is the fact that in many languages, pronominal possessors are normally represented just by possessive affixes on the possessed noun. Thus in Kutenai, a third person pronominal possessor is normally represented by the suffix -\(\text{-}\tilde{\text{\text{-}}}\text{is}\), as in (102a), while nominal possessors will occur as separate nouns, with the same suffix -\(\text{-}\tilde{\text{\text{-}}}\text{is}\) on the possessed noun, as in (102b).

(102) a. \(\text{xali-}\tilde{\text{\text{-}}}\text{is}\)
    \(\text{son-3SG.POSS}\)
    ‘his/her son’

b. \(\text{xali-}\tilde{\text{\text{-}}}\text{is}\) \(\text{qu pàtkiy}\)
    \(\text{son-3SG.POSS}\) that woman
    ‘that woman’s son’
2.1.3. Multiple genitive constructions.

Many languages have more than one genitive construction. English has both the construction with a postnominal possessor, with the preposition of (the mayor of London) and the construction with a prenominal possessor, with the clitic 's (London's mayor).

Awa Pit (Curnow 1997) employs a construction with a clitic postposition if the possessor is human but employs simple juxtaposition if it is nonhuman, as illustrated in (103).

(103) a. Santos=pa pimpul
    Santos=GEN leg
    ‘Santos’ leg’

    b. kwizha pimpul
      dog leg
      ‘the leg of the dog’

Lafofa (Tucker and Bryan 1966), a Kordofanian language spoken in Sudan, has two constructions, one involving juxtaposition with the possessor preceding the possessed noun, as in (104a), the other with the possessor following the noun with a postposition ni, as in (104b).

(104) a. pigwari kai
    chief cows
    ‘the chief’s cows’

    b. kai [pigwari ni]
      cows [chief of]
      ‘the chief’s cows’

Lafofa is like many languages in that it is unclear what conditions the choice between two constructions.

Similarly, Yagua, a language isolate spoken in Peru, there is one construction involving juxtaposition, with the possessor preceding the possessed noun, as in (105a), and a second construction involving a possessive affix on the possessed noun, with the possessor following the possessed noun, as in (105b).

(105) a. Tomáása rooriy
    Tom house
    ‘Tom’s house’

    b. sa-rooriy Tomáása
      3SG.POSS-house Tom
      ‘Tom’s house’

2.1.4. Alienable and inalienable possession

The most common instances of multiple genitive constructions involve a contrast of alienable and inalienable possession. Inalienable possession involves kinship relations and part-whole relations, where the relationship is essentially an inherent or permanent one, as in (106a) and (106b), in contrast to alienable possession, as in (106c), where the relationship is a conventional one.

(106) a. John’s father
    b. John’s hand
    c. John’s dog
In Maybrat (Dol 1999), a West Papuan language, the construction for inalienable possession is head-marking, with a possessive prefix on the head noun, preceded by the possessor, as in (107).

(107) Sely m-me
     Sely 3SG.NONMASC.POSS-mother
     ‘Sely’s mother’

In contrast, the construction for alienable possession is dependent-marking, with a genitive prefix on the possessor, and the possessor follows the possessed noun, as in (108).

(108) amah ro-Petrus
     house GEN-Petrus
     ‘Petrus’ house’

In Lenakel (Lynch 1978), alienable and inalienable possession are treated differently both with pronominal possessors and with nominal possessors, though in different ways. With pronominal possessors in inalienable possession, the possessor is indicated by possessive suffixes on the possessed noun, as in (109).

(109) a. nim-k
     father-1SG.POSS
     ‘my father’

b. nimwansii-mar
     buttocks-1PL.EXCL.POSS
     ‘our backsides’

In contrast, with pronominal possessors in alienable possession, the same possessive suffixes are attached to one of five “possessive classifiers” which follow the possessed noun. These five possessive classifiers are distinguished semantically by properties of the possessed noun: (i) things to be eaten; (ii) things to be drunk; (iii) things to be planted; (iv) places; and (v) other things not fitting into one of the first four categories. Some examples are given in (110).

(110) a. nuw miin nik-k
     yam PLUR POSS.EATEN-1SG
     ‘my yams’

b. nikava ituga nimwa-m
     kava foreign POSS.DRUNK-2SG
     ‘your liquor’

c. nimwa vi taha-k
     house new POSS.OTHER-1SG
     ‘my new house’

There is also a difference between inalienable and alienable possession with nominal possessors. Inalienable possession involves placing the possessor immediately after the possessed noun, without any marker of the relationship, as in (111).

(111) pwia [uus aan]
     older.brother [man that]
     ‘that man’s older brother’

With alienable possession, however, although the possessor follows the possessed noun, the appropriate possessive classifier of the sort illustrated in (110) (but without a possessive suffix) is placed between the two, following the possessed noun and preceding the possessor, as in (112) (which illustrate the two classifiers that are not illustrated in (110)).
In Ngiti (Kutsch Lojenga 1994), inalienable possession involves juxtaposition of the possessor and possessed noun, as in (113).

(113) kamà-do

chief-head

‘the chief’s head’

Alienable possession involves a construction employing one of a small number of postpositional genitive markers, as in (114).

(114) [kamà bhà] dza

[chief GEN] house

‘the chief’s house’

There is also a difference in Ngiti between the two types of possession with pronominal possessors. With inalienable possession, the possessor is expressed by a possessive suffix on the possessed noun, as in (115).

(115) afi-du

heart-1SG.POSS

‘my heart’

Note that the order of morphemes in (115) is the opposite of that in (113), where the possessor occurs as the first part of the compound. With alienable possession, the possessor is expressed by a separate possessive pronominal word preceding the possessed noun, as in (116).

(116) pbàkà ikyi

1SG.POSS cow

‘my cow’

Again, the construction in (116) is different from that in (114), in that no postposition is used.

While the most common relationships involving inalienable possession are kinship relations and part-whole relations, the inalienable construction in Woleian (Sohn 1975), an Austronesian language of Micronesia, also includes objects which are ‘about’ the possessor or by the possessor, as in (117).

(117) a. baabiyor-oï

book-1SG.POSS

‘book about me or by me’

b. sasing-eï

picture-1SG.POSS

‘picture of me’

Contrast (117a) with (118), in which the alienable construction is used.

(118) yaai baabiyor

1SG.POSS.CLSFR book

‘my book, i.e. book belonging to me’

While the choice between the two sorts of possession is partly determined by the particular noun possessed, some nouns in Ngiti, as in many other languages, can occur with either alienable or inalienable possession, with a difference in meaning. For example, in
In some languages, the inalienable construction is not used for both kinship and part-whole relations but only for one of them. In Abun (Berry and Berry 1999), a West Papuan language, the construction used for part-whole relations involves juxtaposition, as in (120a), while alienable possession and kinship relations involve a construction with an intervening genitive word bi, as in (120b) and (120c).

(120) a. Sepenyel gwes Sepenyel leg ‘Sepenyel’s leg’

b. [yetu ge dik yo bi] nu [person CLSFR one INDEF GEN] house ‘someone’s house’

c. [Andar bi] im [Andar GEN] mother ‘Andar’s mother’

While possessive pronouns normally precede the noun in Kana (Ikoro 1996), a Niger-Congo language of Nigeria, there is a distinct set of possessive pronouns that can be used only if the possessed noun is a body part, and these follow the noun, illustrated by the first person possessive pronoun më in (121).

(121) sì më
face 1SG.POSS ‘my face’

The example in (122) illustrates the normal prenominal first person singular possessive pronoun nà, with an alienably possessed noun.

(122) nà kpà
1SG.POSS book ‘my book’

The construction in (122) is also possible with body part nouns, as in (123); in other words, either construction can be used with body part nouns.

(123) nà bà
1SG.POSS hand ‘my hand’

The construction in (121) can only be used with body part terms and cannot be used with kinship terms. Kinship terms occur with the prenominal possessive pronoun; however, they occur with a different tone, as in (124), showing that Kana actually has a three-way contrast between alienable possession, body parts and kinship terms.
While a contrast of alienable and inalienable possession is semantically-based, it is very common for the precise division to be lexically determined. The examples in (115) and (119a) above from Ngiti illustrate the use of possessive suffixes with inalienable possession. But some nouns denoting body parts only occur in the alienable possession construction. In some cases, this may be because they are more easily separable from their host (e.g. ày¥ œ ‘hair’), but in other cases there is no obvious explanation (e.g. ipfo ‘vagina’). Some kinship terms occur in either construction, without a difference in meaning, as in (125).

(125) a. dadá-du b. pbàkà dadá
elder.sister-1SG.POSS 1SG.POSS elder.sister
‘my elder sister’

In addition, the noun azi may mean either ‘brother-in-law’ or ‘son-in-law’, but when it occurs in the inalienable construction, it has the meaning ‘brother-in-law’, as in (126a), and when it occurs in the alienable construction, it has the meaning ‘son-in-law’, as in (126b).

(126) a. a zi-du b. pbàka a zi
brother.in.law-1SG.POSS 1SG.POSS son.in.law
‘my brother-in-law’ ‘my son-in-law’

Furthermore, some nouns in Ngiti require the inalienable possession construction although their meanings, at least the meaning suggested by the English glosses, might lead one to expect they would occur in the alienable possession construction, e.g. -li ‘charcoal’, -ká ‘feather’, -ra ‘flour’, -tsí ‘something worthless’.

Similarly, in Maybrat, while a person’s house involves alienable possession, as in (108) above, a pig’s nest involves inalienable possession, as illustrated in (127) (where the position of the possessor before the head noun and the possessive prefix on the head noun is the construction for inalienable possession).

(127) fane m-sif
pig 3SG.NONMASC.POSS-nest
‘the pig’s nest’

And in Dongolese Nubian (Armbruster 1960), a Nilo-Saharan language spoken in northern Sudan, a subset of kinship terms are inalienably possessed and cannot occur without a possessive prefix, illustrated in (128).

(128) a. tintim-bés b. tintin-ën
3PL.POSS-brother 3PL.POSS-mother
‘their brother’ ‘their mother’

However, there are other kin terms in Dongolese Nubian that behave like alienably possessed nouns: they do not take possessive prefixes, but occur with the genitive forms of independent pronouns, including the nouns for ‘son’ and ‘daughter’, as in (129a), the same construction used with alienable possession, as in (129b).

(129) a. tín ród b. tín hánui g
3PL.GEN son 3PL.GEN donkey.PLUR
‘their son’ ‘their donkeys’
2.1.5. Nonreferential genitives

Many languages distinguish a genitive construction with a referential genitive from one with a nonreferential genitive, illustrated by the contrast in the English examples in (130).

(130) a. John likes that deer's antlers.
    b. John likes deer antlers.

In (130a), the antlers of a specific deer are being referred to, while in (130b), no specific deer is involved. The English construction for nonreferential genitives in (130b) involves juxtaposition. English has a second construction for nonreferential genitives that superficially resembles the referential genitive construction in (130a) in that it involves the genitive clitic 's; however, the noun marked with the genitive clitic occurs in adjective position, possibly following other adjectives, as in (131a), unlike referential genitives, which occur in determiner position, preceding adjectives, as in (131b).

(131) a. a blue [woman's] hat
    b. [that woman's] blue hat

In Roviana (Corston-Oliver 2002), the construction with a referential genitive involves a possessive suffix on the head noun, as in (132a), while a nonreferential genitive involves juxtaposition, as in (132b).

(132) a. mamalaengi-na [barikaleqe hoi]
    voice-3SG.POSS [woman that]
    'that woman's voice'

    b. mamalaengi barikaleqe
    voice woman
    'a woman's voice/a female voice'

2.2 Adpositional phrases

Languages differ as to whether they allow adpositional phrases or noun phrases with oblique cases to modify nouns. This is possible in English, as in that box on the table and in Bawm (Reichle 1981), a Tibeto-Burman language of Bangladesh, as illustrated in (133), where the postpositional phrase in sungah 'in the house' precedes the noun.

(133) [in sungah] mi tlâ
    house in man PLUR
    'the people in the house'

But in Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993), a Daghestanian language of the Caucasus region of Russia, this is not possible. To express what English would express by means of a prepositional phrase modifying a noun, Lezgian must place the modifying phrase (in which the noun is in the subelative case) in a relative clause with an appropriate verb, such as the verb meaning ‘be’, as in (134).

(134) hajwan-r-ikaj tîr max-ar
    animal-PLUR-SUBELATIVE be.PTCPL story-PLUR
    'fairy tales about animals'
    (literally 'fairy tales which are about animals')
2.3 Relative clauses

Because relative clauses are discussed at greater length in Chapter II.4, the discussion here will be somewhat abbreviated, concentrating on structural matters. Languages vary as to whether the relative clause takes the same form as a main clause, with the possible addition of some relative word, like a relative pronoun, marking the clause. In (135), from Abun (Berry and Berry 1999), the relative clause takes the same form as a main clause, except for the initial relative word \( gato \) and a “gap” in the relative clause corresponding semantically to the head of the relative clause.

(135) \( \text{suk-jan} \ [\text{gato} \ \text{án} \ \text{jan} \ \text{mo} \ \text{neggwe}] \)
plant-NOMIN [REL 3PL plant in garden]
‘plants that they plant in that garden’

Note that in Abun, as in the majority of languages, the relative words are not relative pronouns, since they are invariant words lacking pronominal features.

In other languages, like Yukaghir (Maslova 1999), a language isolate spoken in Russia in Siberia, the verb in relative clauses takes a suffix marking it as being in a relative clause, as in (136).

(136) \( \text{[tude-gele} \ \text{joq-to-l]} \ \text{ani-\text{pe}} \)
[3SG-ACC arrive-CAUS-REL] fish-PLUR
‘the fish that had brought him’

Such verb forms are often called participles, especially when they are nonfinite, as in Yukaghir, lacking the inflections found with main verbs. Participial modifiers of nouns in English, such as eating the sandwich in (137), are relative clauses of this sort.

(137) The man [eating the sandwich] looks familiar.

Some languages require that a demonstrative or some sort of determiner occur in a noun phrase whenever the noun is modified by a relative clause. For example, while determiners are in general optional in noun phrases in Woleaian (Sohn 1975), one is required when the noun phrase contains a relative clause, illustrated by the demonstrative \( la \) ‘that’ in (138).

(138) \( \text{i giula} \ \text{biuleiu} \ \text{la} \ [\text{ye log iyang}] \)
1SG know place that [3SG stay there]
‘I know the place where he lives’

There are other languages in which it is not a grammatical requirement that there be an article or demonstrative, but in which the use of such words is more common than in other noun phrases. An example of such a language is Bagirmi (Stevenson 1969), a Central Sudanic language spoken in Chad, illustrated in (139).

(139) \( \text{n\text{\text{\text{'}}}on} \ [\text{ga} \ \text{ma} \ \text{m-ak-iny}] \ \text{na} \)
[REL 1SG 1SG-see-3SG.OBJ] DEF
‘the boy who I saw’

Some languages have determiners or articles that are specific to relative clauses. For example, Woleaian has a special indefinite determiner \( \text{le} \) that is only used in indefinite noun phrases containing a relative clause, as in (140).

(140) \( \text{i tipe} \ \text{le} \ [\text{se-mal} \ \text{yaremat} \ \text{le} \ [\text{ye gach}]] \)
1SG want [one-CLSFR person INDEF [3SG good]]
‘I want someone who is good’
Conversely, Takia (Ross 2002a) has a clitic –n which attaches to the end of relative clause in a noun phrase, as in (141), but it only occurs with relative clauses in noun phrases that are interpreted as definite.

(141) ab a [on w-abiya-n]  
house DEM house 2SG-build=REL.DEF  
‘the house that you built’

Relative clauses in Jur Mödö (Persson 1981), a Central Sudanic language spoken in Sudan, must begin with one of two relative markers or with a demonstrative. Furthermore, if the noun phrase is specific, the relative clause must also occur with a clause-final marker. The example in (142) illustrates a relative clause with both a clause-initial marker ámé and a clause-final marker nè.

(142) bò [ámé ‘bêni rò bò dôři nè]  
person [REL his body person right.hand REL]  
‘the person who was the right-handed one’

In some languages, the relative clause does not modify the noun, but is a clause containing a noun phrase that corresponds semantically to the head noun in English translations. Such relative clauses are often called internally-headed relative clauses and are discussed in section 3.2 below.

2.4. Conjoined noun phrases

Most languages allow noun phrases that are formed by conjoining or co-ordinating two noun phrases, as in English the house and the garage and the Kutenai example in (143), where the conjunction is a clitic that attaches to the first conjunct.

(143) títqa‘-e paṭkiy  
man-and woman  
‘a man and a woman’

See Chapter II.1 for detailed discussion of co-ordinate constructions.

3. Noun phrases without nouns

In the narrowest sense of the term, a noun phrase must contain a noun or pronoun, possibly accompanied by other words or phrases modifying the noun or pronoun. Many languages have constituents that are not of this form, but which are sometimes called noun phrases because of grammatical similarities to typical instances of noun phrases, such as occurrence in subject or object position. Whether or not such constituents are properly called noun phrases, I will assume to be a purely terminological question. But for some of the constructions in question, if we don’t call them noun phrases, we have a need for some alternative label that includes both noun phrases and these other constructions. For purposes of presentation, I will use the term “noun phrase” broadly here.

3.1. Noun phrases with only “modifying” words

Many languages allow noun phrases that consist of words that normally would be modifiers of a noun, but without any noun. In the example in (144) from Nkore-Kiga (Taylor 1985), the subject is a word that normally functions as an adjective.
Similarly, the noun phrase in (145) from Spanish (Luis Paris, p.c.) consists of a determiner plus an adjective.

(145)   el    blanco
     the.MASC white-MASC
        “the white one (masculine)”

In the example in (146) from Misantla Totonac (Mackay 1999), spoken in Mexico, the adjective occurs with a possessive prefix (which is also possible when the adjective is modifying a noun).

(146)   is-ci    haá
     3POSS-black sleep
        “his black one is sleeping”

It is important to distinguish cases like these where the construction is possible for any adjective from phenomena like English the poor, which is possible only with certain adjectival words (cf. *the wide) and has a different range of meanings from that found with adjectives modifying nouns; note that one cannot use the poor in (147a), but must say the poor one, as in (147b).

(147)   a. *All of the students in the class were very good except for one, and the poor was failing.
        b. All of the students in the class were very good except for one, and the poor one was failing.

Furthermore, the poor in English is grammatically plural (The poor are forgotten, *The poor is forgotten). It is probably best to treat English poor as a word that is sometimes an adjective and sometimes a noun, with distinct meanings.

Similar phenomena are occasionally found with other sorts of words or phrases that normally occur as modifiers of nouns. The example in (148) from Tidore illustrates the third plural pronoun functioning as a definite article (as in (10) above) combining with a semantic adjective and a numeral.

(148)   ona    jang    malofo
     3PL beautiful two
        “the two beautiful ones”

The example in (149) from Koyra Chiini (Heath 1999) contains a possessor phrase followed by a definite article.

(149) [woò di yo wan] dē
     [DEM DEF PLUR of] DEF
        “the one [-wage] of those [workers]”
     (literally: “the of those”)

In fact, English also allows possessor phrases without a noun to function as noun phrases, as in (150).

(150) Your car is nice, but John’s is nicer.
which is not expressed overtly. One argument that is given for such an approach is that when a
speaker uses noun phrases of this sort, it is normally the case that it is clear in the context what
noun could have been used. A second argument is that in cases like (145) above from Spanish,
the gender of the article is determined by the gender of the noun that could have been used.

But neither of these arguments is convincing. The fact that one can normally provide a
noun that could have been used may simply reflect a fact about language use: normally when
speakers refer to something, they can identify a noun that fits the thing. It is usually the case
that when speakers use third person pronouns they are able to identify a noun that they could
have used; but nobody would suggest that noun phrases consisting just of pronouns involve
ellipsis of a noun. Similarly, in languages like Spanish, the gender of third person pronouns
depends on what noun could have been used, but again it would be very odd to analyse such
pronouns as involving ellipsis of a noun. Furthermore, such noun phrases without nouns can
be used in those relatively infrequent contexts where the speaker does not know what the thing
is, as in (151).

(151) She saw something large and something small inside the cave, and then she saw the
large thing move.

Languages that permit noun phrases without nouns apparently employ them in contexts like that
in (151). For example, Hebrew (David Gil, p.c.) would use the form in (152).

(152) ha-gadol
    DEF-large,SG.MASC
    ‘the large one’

In such a context, Spanish (Luis Paris, p.c.) uses a distinctive article *lo* that lacks a gender, as
in (153).

(153) lo grande
    ART large
    ‘the large (thing)’

In fact, the article *lo* cannot be used with a noun, suggesting that any analysis in terms of
ellipsis is problematic.

Another possible approach to such cases with adjectives but no nouns is to say that the
adjective is functioning as a noun in such cases. However, such an approach confuses word
class with grammatical function. Such an approach is motivated if the phenomenon is lexically
constrained, but not if it is productive for all members of a class. Treating these adjectives as
nouns is analogous to saying that *music* in English *music* teacher is an adjective because it is
modifying a noun, rather than simply saying that English allows nouns to modify nouns.

In some languages, when adjectives are used without an accompanying noun, they can
occur with morphology that they do not occur with if a noun is present. For example, in Koyra
Chiini, when an adjective is used without a noun, the adjective must take a prefix *i-*, which
Heath (1999) calls an “Absolute” prefix, as in (154).

(154) i-jeeno di
    ABSOL-old DEF
    ‘the old one’

Similarly, if a numeral is used without a noun, it is either unmarked, or occurs with a separate
absolute prefix *a-*, as in (155).

(155) a-hi˝ka di
    ABSOL-two the
    ‘the two of them’
In some languages, the syntax of noun phrases without nouns may be different from those with nouns. For example, in Adioukrou (Herault 1978), a Kwa language spoken in Côte d’Ivoire, a noun phrase with an adjective but no noun requires a definite article, while the definite article is optional if there is a noun.

3.2. Headless relative clauses

Headless relative clauses are a specific instance of noun phrases without nouns, but they are sufficiently common and have various distinctive features that they warrant separate discussion. There are in fact a number of different sorts of constructions that can be called headless relative clauses. Not all linguists would call all of the constructions discussed here headless relative clauses. I use the term in a fairly loose sense for relative clauses that do not modify nouns or pronouns.

The English construction in (156a) differs from the construction in (157a) from Miya (Schuh 1998) in that the form of the headless relative clause in (157a) is the same as the form of relative clause in (157b) modifying a noun, while this is not the case with the English construction in (156a), as illustrated by (156b).

(156) a. I don’t like what you bought.
    b. I don’t like the coat that/which/*what you bought.

(157) a. má ráfaza
    REL.FEM.SG wet
    ‘the one [feminine, singular] that is wet’
    b. kàba [má ráfaza]
    gown [REL.FEM.SG wet]
    ‘the gown that is wet’

In some languages, headless relative clauses can occur with other words that otherwise occur as modifiers of nouns. In Koromfe, while a noun phrase can consist of just a headless relative clause, as in (158a), it is also possible for the noun phrase to contain additional words that otherwise occur as modifiers of noun, as in (158b), where the noun phrase consists of the headless relative clause bənɔmə tufu ‘those who were sitting’ plus a definite article and a quantifier.

(158) a. mɔ hɛmsɛ [ala bə bon me]
    1SG meet.PAST REL.SG NEG like 1SG
    ‘I met [someone] who doesn’t like me’
    b. [bənɔmə tufu bə] duru] bo ke ...
    REL.PLUR sit.DUR DEF.HUMAN.PLUR all] say COMP
    ‘all those who were sitting said that ...’

In some languages, headless relative clauses require an article, as in the Spanish (Luis Paris, p.c.) example in (159).

(159) el [que pasa]
    the.MASC [REL pass]
    ‘the one who is passing’

In Yukaghir (Maslova 1999), there is a distinct verbal suffix associated with headless relative clauses. Compare (160a) (a repetition of (136) above), where the relative clause has a head noun, with (160b), where the relative clause is headless and the verb takes a suffix -ben marking the relative clause as headless.

(160) a. mə hɛmsɛ [ala bə bon me]
    1SG meet.PAST REL.SG NEG like 1SG
    ‘I met [someone] who doesn’t like me’
    b. [bənɔmə tufu bə] duru] bo ke ...
    REL.PLUR sit.DUR DEF.HUMAN.PLUR all] say COMP
    ‘all those who were sitting said that ...’
In some languages, the morphology of relative clauses is such that the verbs are in some sense more nominal than finite verbs in main clauses, and one might construe the verb in such languages as sufficiently nominal, that in the absence of a noun head, the verb is functioning as the nominal head of the noun phrase. For example, in Latin, a participial phrase can function as a noun phrase, and it inflects for case and number in a fashion similar to nouns, as in (161).

(161) [puer-ōs voca-nt-em] vide-ō
    boy-ACC.PL call-PRES.PTCPL-ACC.SG see.PRES-1SG
    ‘I see the one that is calling the boys’

Note that the nominal nature of the participle in Latin reflects the fact that participles resemble adjectives morphologically and in the external syntax of the participial phrase (e.g. modifying nouns) coupled with the fact that adjectives are highly nominal in Latin, as illustrated in (58) above. The possibility of employing participial phrases without nouns mirrors the same possibility found with adjectives, as in (162).

(162) long-um vide-ō
    tall-ACC.SG.MASC see.PRES-1SG
    ‘I see the tall one (masculine)’

It should be emphasized, however, that in their internal syntax, participial phrases are syntactically like clauses; transitive participles, for example, occur with accusative case-marked direct objects, as illustrated by the puerōs ‘boys’, object of vocantem ‘one who is calling’ in (161). Participles thus exhibit a mixture of verbal, adjectival, and nominal features.

Another example illustrating a relative construction in which the verb exhibits nominal properties is found in Evenki, a Tungus language spoken in Siberia. The headless relative clause in (163a) is analogous to the headed relative clause in (163b).

(163) a. [bi ugi-r-ari-v] so:t urgepchu
    [I lift-PTCPL-1SG.POSS] very heavy
    ‘what I am lifting is very heavy’

b. [[bi ugi-r-ari-v] d’o] so:t urgepchu
    [[I lift-PTCPL-1SG.POSS] stone] very heavy
    ‘the stone that I am lifting is very heavy’

The nominal nature of the participle is reflected by the fact that it takes a possessive suffix inflecting for the features of the subject of the participle.

The Turkish example in (164) (Kornfilt 1997) is somewhat analogous: not only do we get a possessive suffix on the participle inflecting for features of the subject of the relative clause, but that subject, adamın, is in the genitive case rather than nominative case, and the participle itself is marked with accusative case, reflecting the function of the noun phrase in the main clause.
We thus find a number of respects in which the participial relative clause exhibits nominal features.

A somewhat different sort of construction is found in Cebuano, an Austronesian language spoken in the Philippines, illustrated in (165).

While the structure in (165) involves a noun phrase consisting of a determiner ang followed by a clause, it is not clear that the label “relative clause” is appropriate for that clause, since it lacks the relative marker nga that occurs with headed relative clauses, as in (166).

Nevertheless, it shares with the relative clause in (166) the fact that there is a “gap” in the clause, corresponding to the referent of the entire noun phrase, and both constructions are subject to the grammatical constraint that only the grammatical “topic” (which is the actor in a clause where the verb is actor focus) can be relativized.

Cebuano reflects a language type in which there is a weak noun-verb distinction and in so far as there is such a distinction, it seems to play little role in constraining what can occur in noun phrases. In other words, noun phrases can be formed from a determiner plus a word that can be a noun or a verb or an adjective, or words that normally occur as modifiers or complements of such words, such as the object noun phrase sa saging in (165). Thus the two sentences in (167) apparently have the same grammatical structure.

Nouns and verbs exhibit some differences in Cebuano (for example in their morphology), but these differences are irrelevant to the syntactic constructions reflected in (167). In this sense, the verb midagan ‘run’ in (167b) just as much a head as the noun babaye ‘woman’ in (167a). Nevertheless, examples like (167b) illustrate the equivalent of a headless relative clause in other languages, and illustrate a further type of noun phrase lacking a noun.

The final subtype of headless relative clause is so-called internally-headed relative clauses (discussed also in Chapter II.4). Many linguists are at pains to distinguish headless relative clauses from internally-headed relative clauses, and there may be languages in which one needs to distinguish two separate constructions, but the term “headless relative clause” is being used deliberately here to cover phenomena involving noun phrases that contain relative clauses that are not modifying a noun (or pronoun). The examples in (168) illustrate internally-headed relative clauses in Mesa Grande Diegueño (Cuoro and Langdon 1975), a Yuman language spoken along the border of the United States and Mexico.
In both sentences in (168), the subject of the main clause is a noun phrase which consists of a clause followed by a definite clitic and a subject case clitic. In both sentences, the noun that corresponds to the head noun in the English translation occurs inside the relative clause. This is clearest with gaat 'cat' in (168a), since it is preceded and followed by words in the relative clause. The reason that constructions like these are often called internally-headed is that the noun that corresponds to the head in the English translations is internal to the relative clause. If we use the word 'head' in a purely semantic way, to denote the word that corresponds to the head noun in the English translation, then we can call gaat 'cat' in (168a) the head.

It is important to emphasize that the noun which is semantically the head in these clauses is not in any grammatical sense a head. Rather, gaat 'cat' in (168a) is grammatically a noun (phrase) functioning as object of the verb akewii 'chase'. Its special role arises from the fact that it is semantically co-indexed with the entire noun phrase that consists of the relative clause plus the definite and subject case clitics. But because it is not grammatically a head, and because the noun phrase consists only of the relative clause and the two clitics, these examples satisfy the criteria here for headless relative clauses.

In languages with internally-headed relative clauses there is often a problem of potential ambiguity: if the relative clause contains two or more nouns, which of these nouns is to be interpreted as the semantic head, the noun (phrase) coreferential to the noun phrase containing the relative clause? The Diegueño examples in (168) are unambiguous for the following reasons. The fact that the noun phrase in (168a) that contains the internally-headed relative clause denotes the cat, while that in (168b) denotes the dog, follows from the presence of the subject relative prefix kw- in (168b) and its absence in (168a). Its presence in (168b) signals that the noun phrase containing the internally-headed relative clause is coreferential to the subject in the relative clause, which is 'ehatt dog'. That this noun is subject is determined by the word order in the relative clause: subjects precede objects. Conversely, the absence of this prefix on the verb in (168a) signals that the larger noun phrase is coreferential to a nonsubject in the relative clause, and in the absence of an alternative, this is the object gaat 'cat'.

Note that in languages with internally-headed relative clauses in which semantic adjectives are grammatically verbs, semantic adjectives do not modify nouns, but occur as the verb in the internally-headed relative clause, with the noun as subject of the semantic adjective. In the Diegueño example in (169), for example, the word kunemshap 'white' is the verb in an internally-headed relative clause, with aq 'bone' its subject.

Because internally-headed relative clauses with semantic adjectives typically consist of two words, it may not be obvious at first glance that in examples like (169) from Diegueño, the semantic adjective is not modifying the noun. However, once one sees that semantic adjectives are verbs, and once one sees that structures with a semantic adjective are precisely the same structures as examples that more clearly involve internally-headed relative clauses, as examples like those in (168) above show for Diegueño, then it becomes apparent that the structures with semantic adjectives are just a simple form of internally-headed relative clause.
In languages with internally-headed relative clauses, it is common for there to be no semantic head noun in the relative clause, in which case the relative clause is headless, even using 'head' in a semantic sense. This is illustrated by the Kutenai example in (170a). In this example, the subject of the main clause is ni\textsuperscript{2} ku wu\textsuperscript{-}kat ‘the person/thing that I saw’, which consists of the definite article ni\textsuperscript{2} followed by the subordinate clause ku wu\textsuperscript{-}kat ‘I saw him/her/it’. Its structure is the same as (170b), except that in (170b), there is a semantic head noun in the relative clause, so that the subject of the main clause consists of the definite article ni\textsuperscript{2} followed by the subordinate clause ku wu\textsuperscript{-}kat pa\textsuperscript{-}kiy ‘I saw the woman’.

(170) a. wïtq\textsuperscript{?}-ni [ni\textsuperscript{2} k-u wu\textsuperscript{-}kat]
   big-INDIC [DEF SUBORD=1SUBJ see]
   ‘the person/thing that I saw was tall’ or ‘the thing that I saw was big’

b. wïtq\textsuperscript{?}-ni [ni\textsuperscript{2} k-u wu\textsuperscript{-}kat pa\textsuperscript{-}kiy]
   big-INDIC [DEF SUBORD=1SUBJ see woman]
   ‘the woman that I saw was tall’

It is important to emphasize that the two examples in (170) do not involve different constructions. The difference between (170a) and (170b) simply reflects the general possibility in Kutenai that a third person argument that is interpreted pronominally will not be expressed overtly. In other words, the absence of a semantic head noun in (170a) simply reflects a pronoun interpretation. Thus the difference between (170a) and (170b) is the same as the difference between (171a) and (171b), except that the examples in (171) are not subordinative.

(171) a. h—u wu\textsuperscript{-}kat-i
   1SUBJ see-INDIC
   ‘I saw her’

b. h—u wu\textsuperscript{-}kat-i pa\textsuperscript{-}kiy
   1SUBJ see-INDIC woman
   ‘I saw the/a woman’

In fact, if we embed the examples in (171) as complement clauses, as in (172), we get structures which are identical to those in (170), except that these complement clauses denote a proposition and are not interpreted as coreferential to something inside the subordinate clause.

(172) a. h\textsuperscript{1} n\textsuperscript{2}-upx-ni [ni\textsuperscript{2} k-u wu\textsuperscript{-}kat]
   1SUBJ INDIC=know-INDIC [DEF SUBORD=1SUBJ see]
   ‘I know that I saw him/her/it’

b. h\textsuperscript{1} n\textsuperscript{2}-upx-ni [ni\textsuperscript{2} k-u wu\textsuperscript{-}kat pa\textsuperscript{-}kiy]
   1SUBJ INDIC=know-INDIC [DEF SUBORD=1SUBJ see woman]
   ‘I know that I saw the/a woman’

3.3. Noun clauses

The term ‘noun clause’ is often applied to subordinate clauses which appear in positions otherwise associated with noun phrases, as illustrated by the noun clauses in subject position in (173a) from English and (174) from Mandarin Chinese (Li and Thompson 1981), and the noun clauses in object position in the English example in (173b) and the Kutenai examples above in (172).

(173) a. [That he might return] never occurred to me.
   b. I know [that it will rain].
While noun clauses are like headless relatives in being clauses that are functioning as or like noun phrases, they differ in that noun phrases which are headless relatives are always coreferential to some expression or pronominal argument (usually phonologically null) inside the relative clause, while this is not the case with noun clauses. Noun clauses are not always treated as noun phrases: this depends partly on one’s analysis and partly on the facts in specific languages. For example, in (172) above from Kutenai, the noun clause occurs with a definite article; this is in fact normal in Kutenai with factive noun clauses, noun clauses which are presupposed, as is the case with ñupxni ‘know’. The fact that this type of noun clause occurs with an article is one reason for analysing such clauses in Kutenai as noun phrases.

In addition to finite noun clauses like those in (173) and (174), many languages have various sorts of constructions that denote a clause but where the verb is to varying extents nominalized, as in (175) from Udihe (Nikolaeva and Tolskaya 2001), a Tungus language spoken in eastern Siberia, in Russia.

While this example is naturally translated by a finite clause in English, the subordinate verb in (175) is a participial form that bears nominal inflection, in the form of an accusative case suffix and a third person plural possessive suffix corresponding to the subject of the verb. Discussion of constructions like these and other sorts of nonfinite verbal constructions that serve as arguments of the main verb is beyond the scope of this chapter; see Chapters II.2 and III.6 for further discussion of nominalizations and complementation.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed various sorts of elements that occur in noun phrases crosslinguistically. A more complete discussion of the structure of noun phrases in a language must also cover the order of various modifiers with respect to the noun (see Chapter I.2 [Word Order]) and the possibility of combinations of different modifiers. The latter includes two issues. First, when more than one modifier occurs in the noun phrase, how are they ordered with respect to each other? And second, are there combinations of modifiers that cannot occur? These topics will be discussed here only very briefly.

It is common to represent the order of various modifiers with respect to each other by means of a complex formula, such as that in (176) for noun phrases in Tidore (Van Staden 2000).

While a formula like this includes as many modifiers as possible, this does not mean that speakers will ever produce noun phrases with all modifiers represented. The main point of such formulae is simply to represent the order of any pair of modifiers. Thus (176) says, among other things, that a numeral follows an adjective and that a demonstrative follows a numeral. Such formulae are best at representing preferred orders. Further means are necessary for distinguishing other orders that are possible but less common from orders that are not possible at all. Furthermore, languages occasionally exhibit more complex ordering constraints that are not easily represented in such formulae. For example, in Aari (Hayward 1990), an
Omotic language spoken in Ethiopia, demonstratives more commonly follow the noun, as in (177a), but they only precede the noun if the noun is followed by a numeral, as in (177b).

(177) a. ?eedín keené
   people DEM.PLUR
   ‘these people’

b. keené ðaksí dónq-ine-m
   DEM.PLUR dog five-DEF-ACC
   ‘these five dogs’

Constraints on possible combinations of modifiers are illustrated by the fact that numerals and indefinite quantifiers do not co-occur in Tidore, as the formula in (176) indicates. They are also illustrated by the fact that in English, a prenominal possessive pronoun cannot co-occur with a demonstrative (*that my book, *my that book). But languages differ in this regard. For example, as illustrated in (31) above, Engenni allows not only these two to co-occur, but for them to occur with a definite article as well.

Further Readings

There is surprisingly little typological literature on the structure of noun phrases, despite the fact that this is discussed at length in many descriptive grammars. The most detailed discussion is Rijkhoff (2002). There is also basic discussion in Givón (1990, 2001). The chapters in this anthology on Word Classes I.1, Word Order I.2, Coordination II.1, Complementation II.2, Relative Clauses II.4, Gender and Noun Classes III.4, and Lexical Nominalization III.6 all deal with issues related to topics in this chapter. There is considerable literature on various specific topics touched on in this chapter, only a couple of which can be mentioned here. On issues surrounding semantic adjectives and how languages treat them grammatically, see Dixon (1977b). On alienable and inalienable possession, see Nichols (1988) and Chappell and McGregor, eds. (1996).

References


In discussing the structure of noun phrases cross-linguistically, I will assume a rather rough characterization of noun phrases, as syntactic constituents which serve as arguments of verbs. There are a variety of ways in which this is inadequate as a precise definition and there are a number of legitimate questions about exactly what ought to be considered a ... Non-finite clause Prepositional phrase

Noun Phrase 8: The structure of noun phrase in Vietnamese

Vietnamese have an old saying "Qua bao phong ba b&." For instance:

- Pre-modification Head Post-modification
- Tất cả những cái con mèo ấy

Noun Phrase 9: Basing on the analysis of those linguists together with Mai Ngoc Chu, Vu Duc Nghieu, and Hoang Trong Phien, this paper will discuss in detail the structure of Vietnamese noun phrases.