

English syntax

SECTION 2 – NOUN PHRASE

Constituents, Phrases, Clauses and Sentences

- The natural groupings or parts of a sentence are called **constituents**. Many constituents are phrases.
- A **phrase** is a group of words (or possibly a single word) that functions as a constituent in the syntax of a sentence, a single unit within a grammatical hierarchy.
- A **clause** is the smallest grammatical unit that can express a complete proposition. A typical clause consists of a subject and a predicate, the latter typically a verb phrase, a verb with any objects and other modifiers.
- A **sentence** can include words grouped meaningfully to express a statement, question, exclamation, request, command or suggestion.

Heads, Modifiers and Complements

- The **head** or **nucleus** of a phrase is the word that determines the syntactic category of that phrase
- A **modifier** is an optional element in phrase structure or clause structure. Modifiers may come either before or after the modified element (the *head*), depending on the type of modifier and the rules of syntax for the language in question. A modifier placed before the head is called a **pre-modifier**; one placed after the head is called a **post-modifier**.
- A **complement** is a word, phrase or clause that is necessary to complete the meaning of a given expression. Complements are often also arguments (expressions that help complete the meaning of a predicate).

Head

- The head of a phrase is the element that the phrase is centered on. It is the one essential – or obligatory – element in that phrase.
- Every phrase has a head and no more than one head.
- The category of the head determines the category of the phrase.

• Examples:

(1) They claimed that they did not **destroy** the garden.

VP

(2) She proposed an **analysis** of the sentence.

NP

(3) Jake is so **fond** of coffee.

AP

(4) They are quite **in** agreement.

PP

(5) My sister cycles much **faster** than me.

AdvP

Head & Modifier (Adjunct)

- The big difference between modifiers and heads is this: in the structure of a phrase, **modifiers are optional; the head is the obligatory** element.
- This is a one-way dependency: modifiers depend on heads.
- Modifiers are optional (omissible).
- Some modifiers precede and some follow the heads they modify.

Examples:

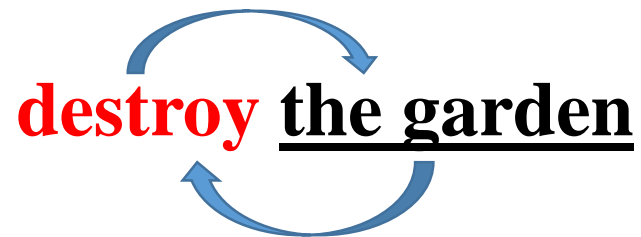
a so exciting film

A diagram illustrating a dependency between a modifier and a head. The phrase "a so exciting film" is shown. The words "so exciting" are underlined in red. Two blue curved arrows indicate the dependency: one starts at the end of "exciting" and points to the beginning of "film", and another starts at the beginning of "exciting" and points to the end of "film".

Head & Complement

- When a head demands a further expression, that further obligatory expression is said to complement the head.
- This is a two-way dependency.
- **Complements are obligatory**, needed to complete the meaning of the phrase.
- The head generally precedes its complement.

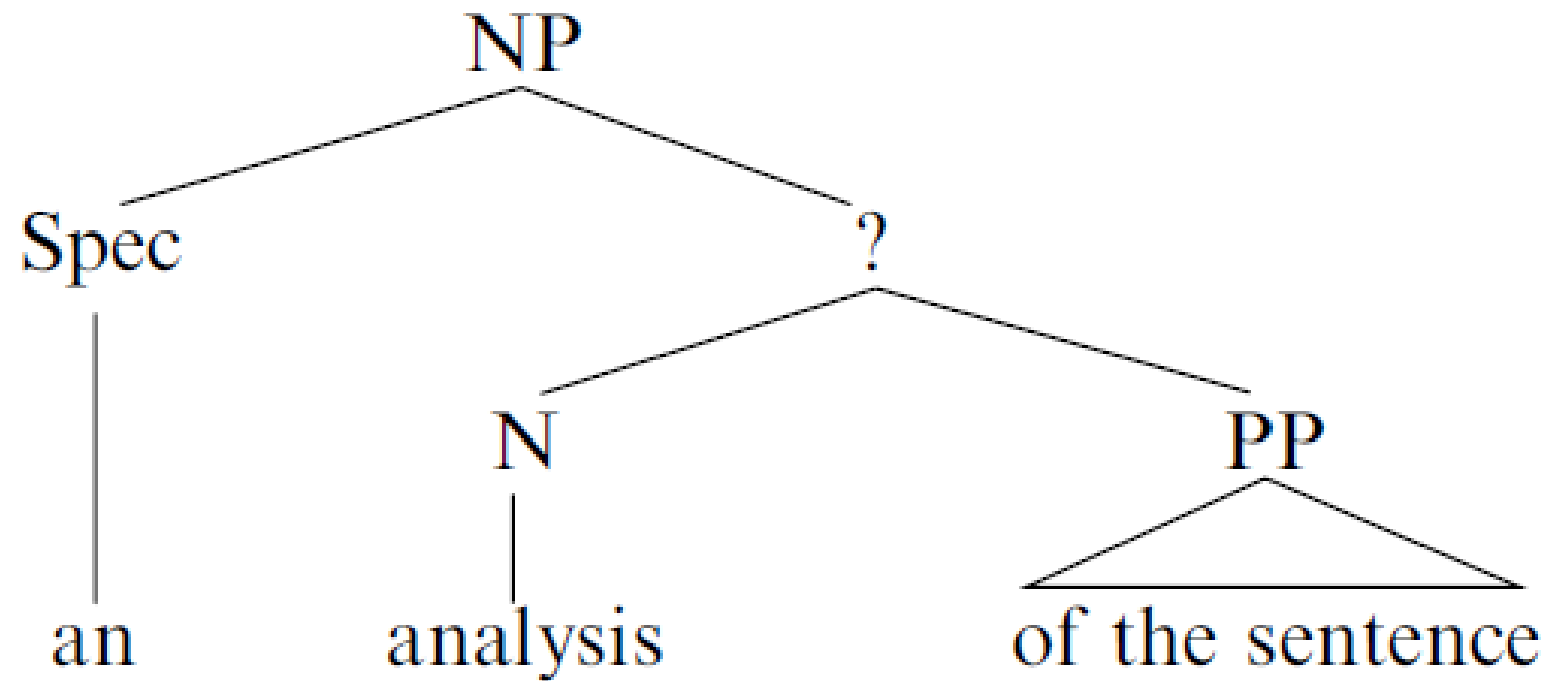
Examples:



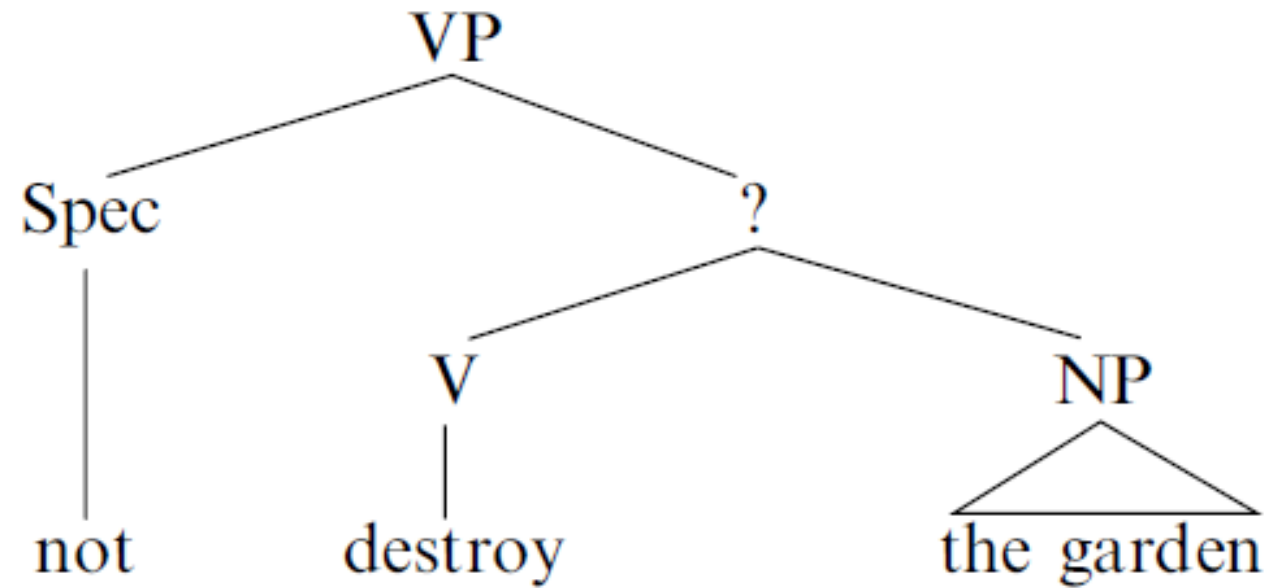
Specifiers

- The elements that precede the heads specify the head + complements sequence: SPECIFIERS.
- Unlike complements, they seem to relate not much to the head.
- Examples:
 - (1) They claimed that they did **not** **destroy** the garden.
 - (2) She proposed **an** **analysis** of the sentence.
 - (3) Jake is **so** **fond** of coffee.
 - (4) They are **quite** **in** agreement.
 - (5) My sister cycles **much** **faster** than me.

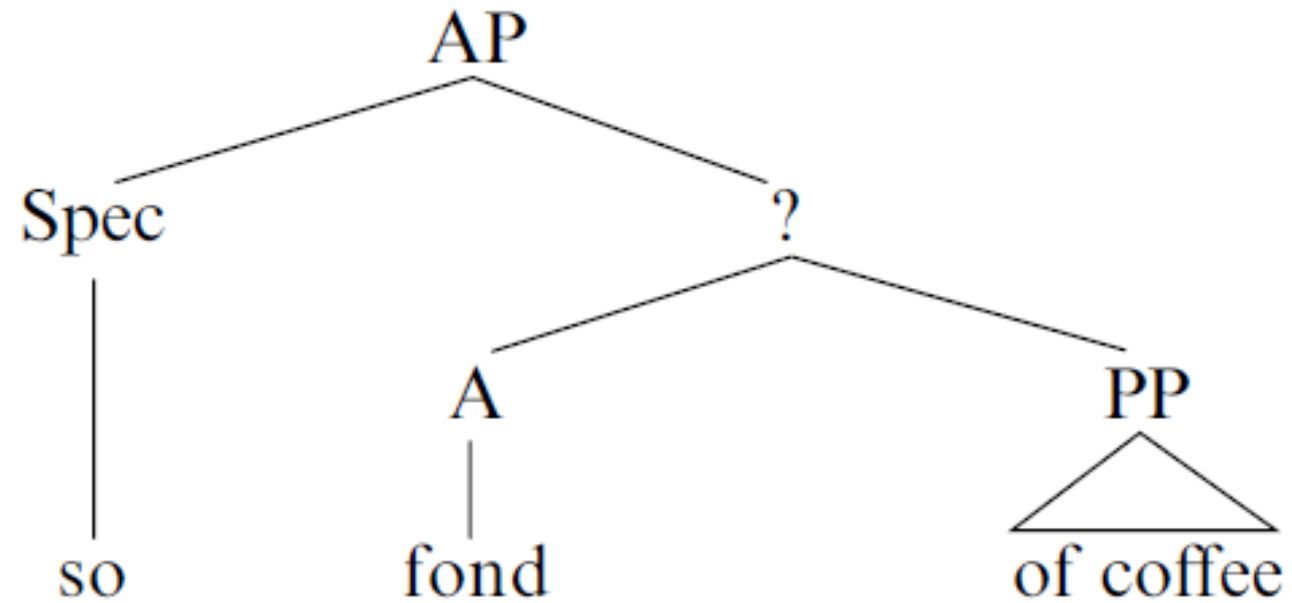
X-bar theory – NP



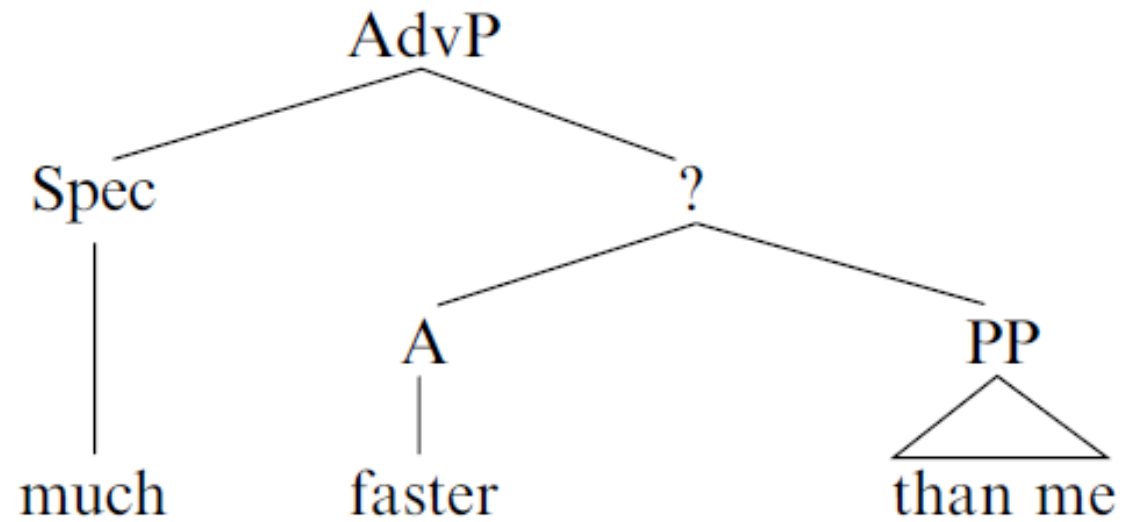
X-bar theory – VP



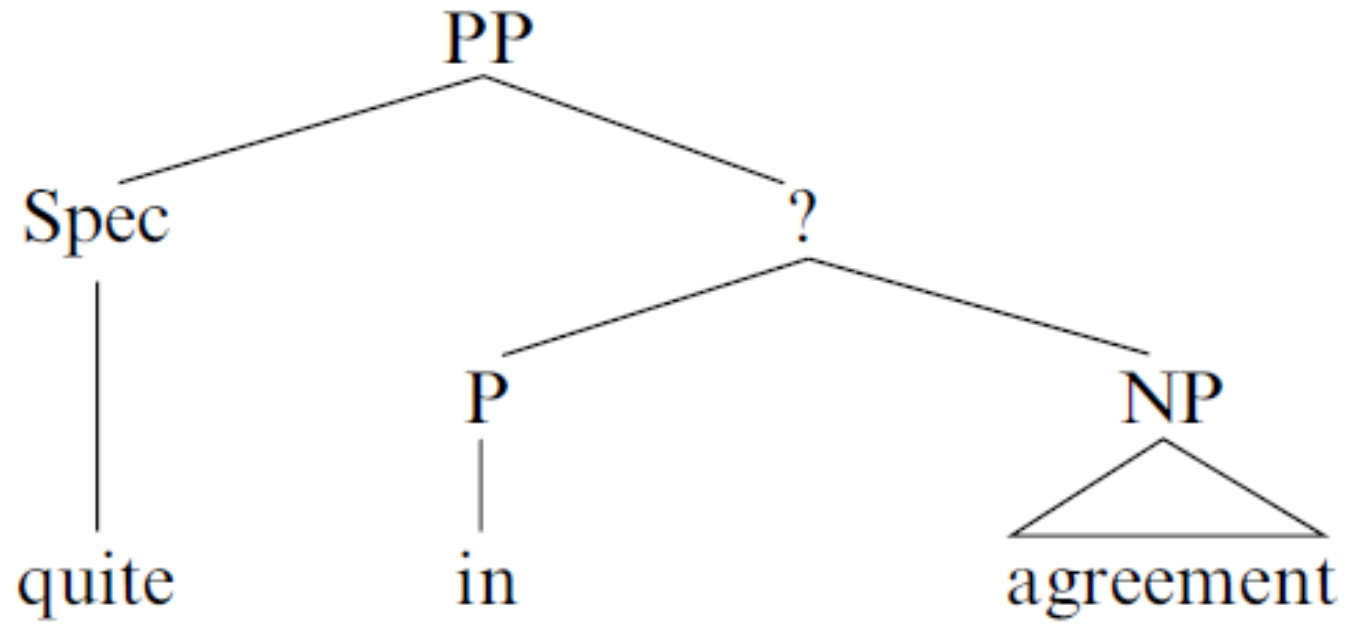
X-bar theory – AP/AdjP



X-bar theory – AdvP

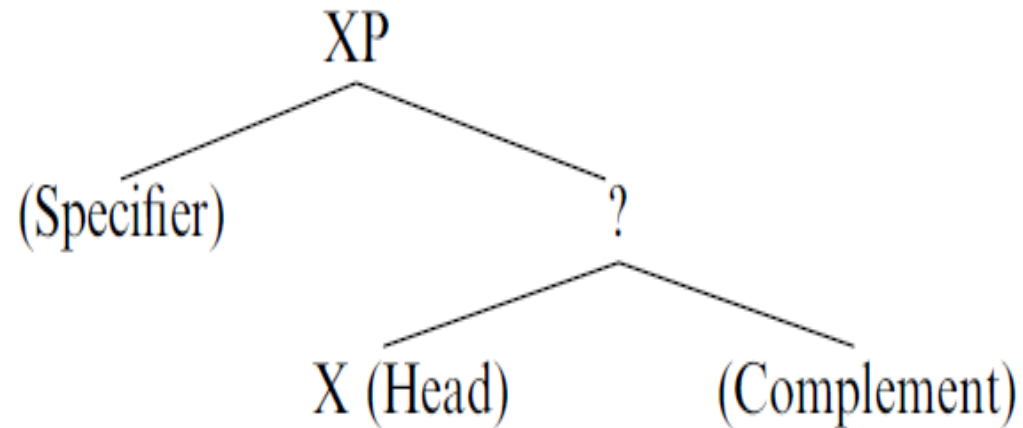


X-bar theory – PP

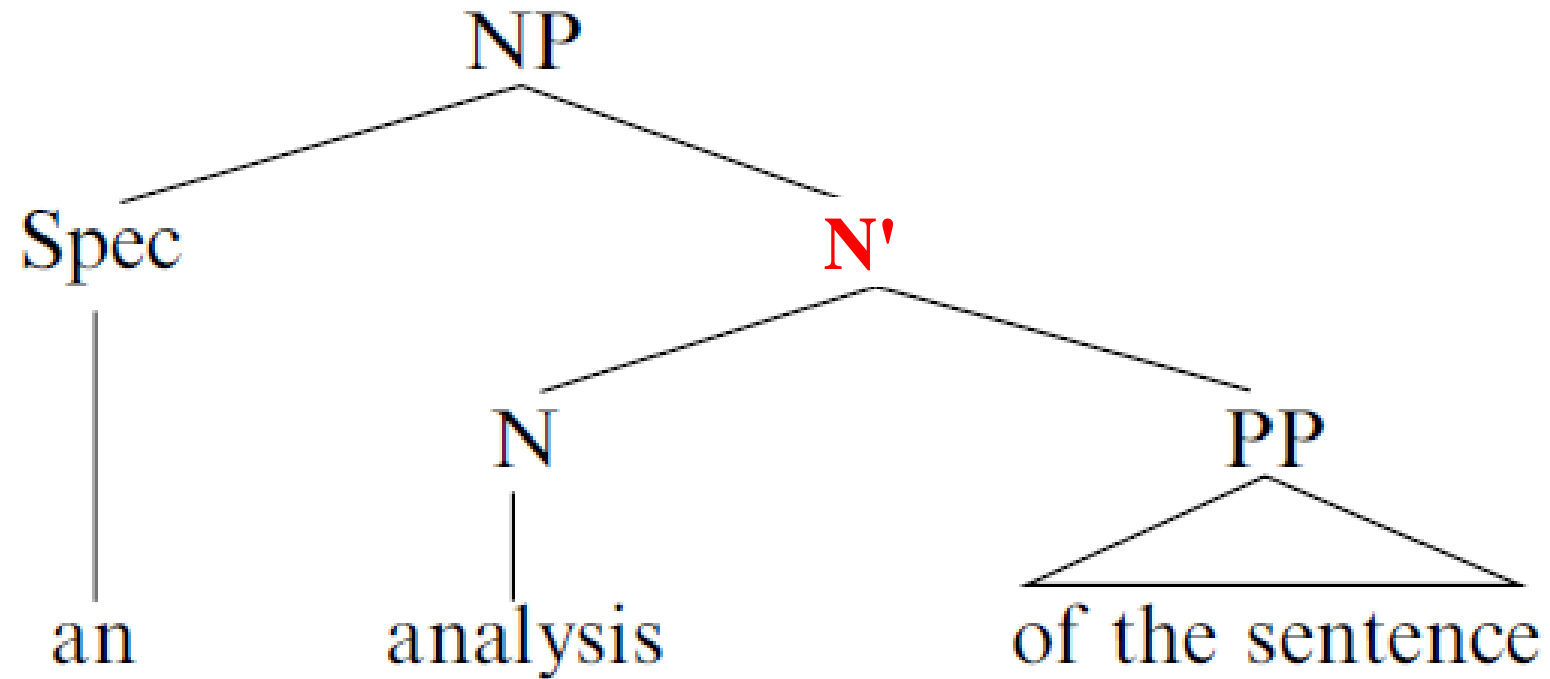


X-bar theory

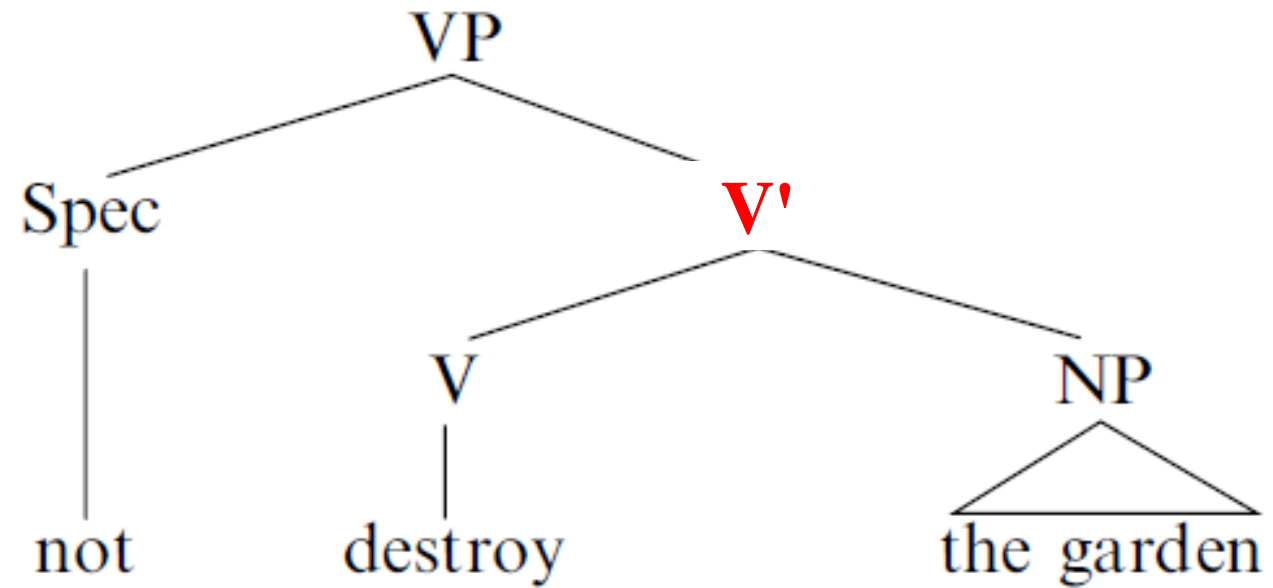
- In this tree ‘XP’ is a phrase headed by X, where X stands for V, N, A, P or Adv. The Specifier is a sister of the node that dominates the Head + Complement sequence, indicated by ‘?’.
- From the tree, it appears that ‘?’ is at a level **that is intermediate** between the phrase level XP and the Head level X. Let us call **this level X’**



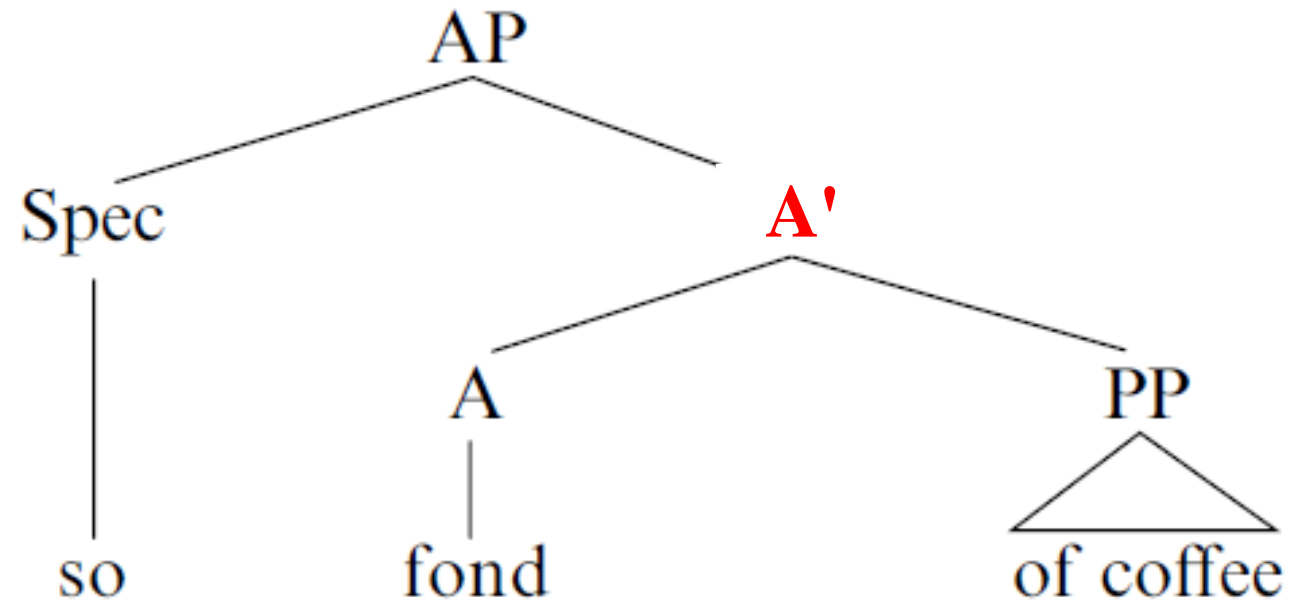
X-bar theory – NP



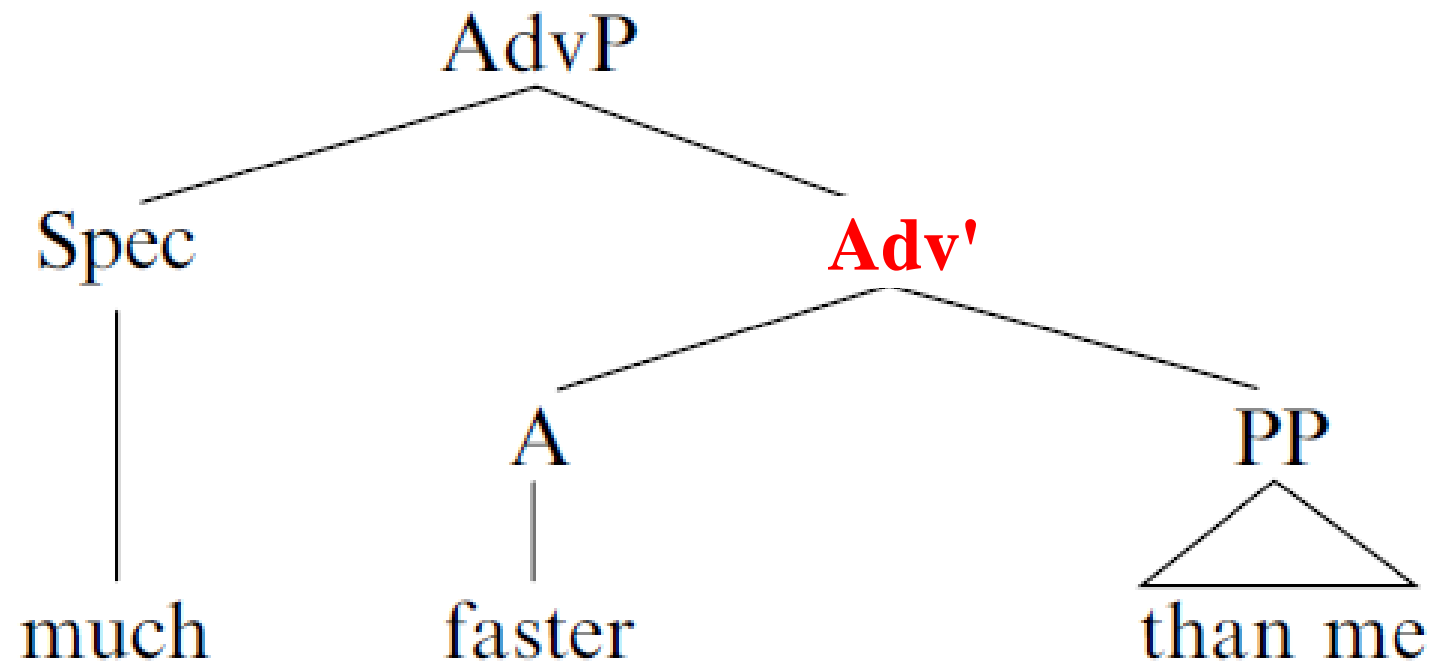
X-bar theory – VP



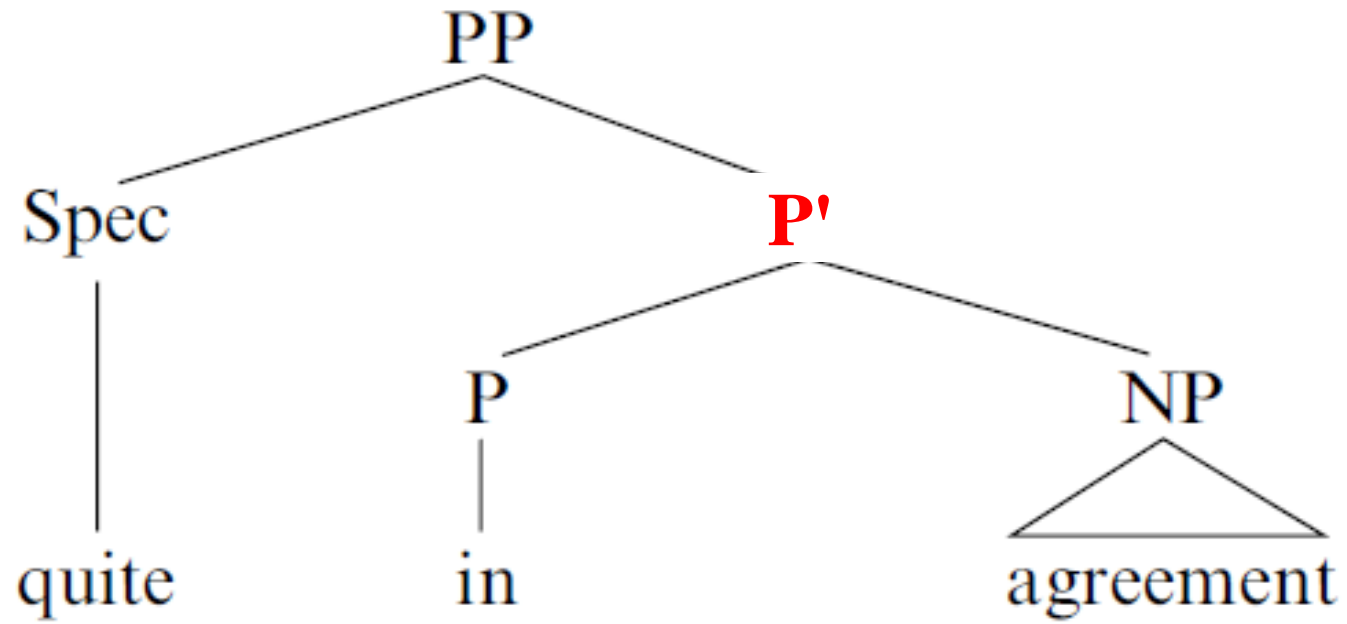
X-bar theory – AP/AdjP



X-bar theory – AdvP



X-bar theory – PP



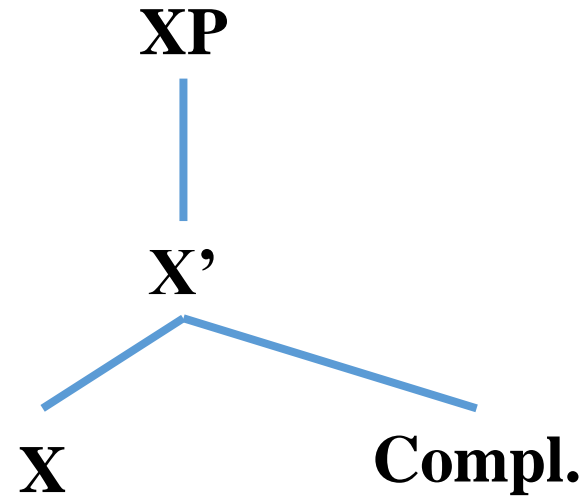
Phrase structure trees

1. Minimal structure



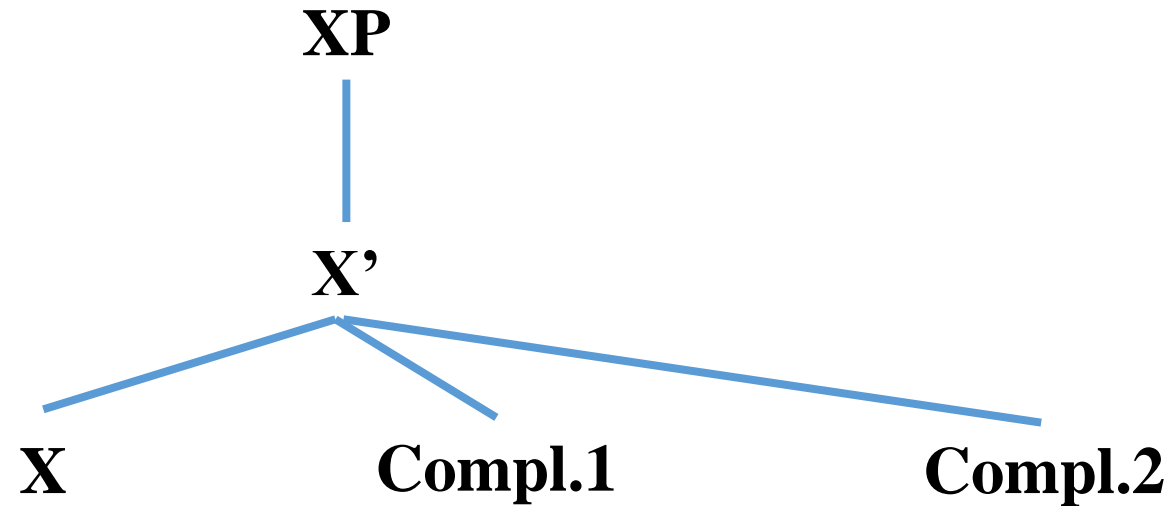
Phrase structure trees

2. Structure with one complement



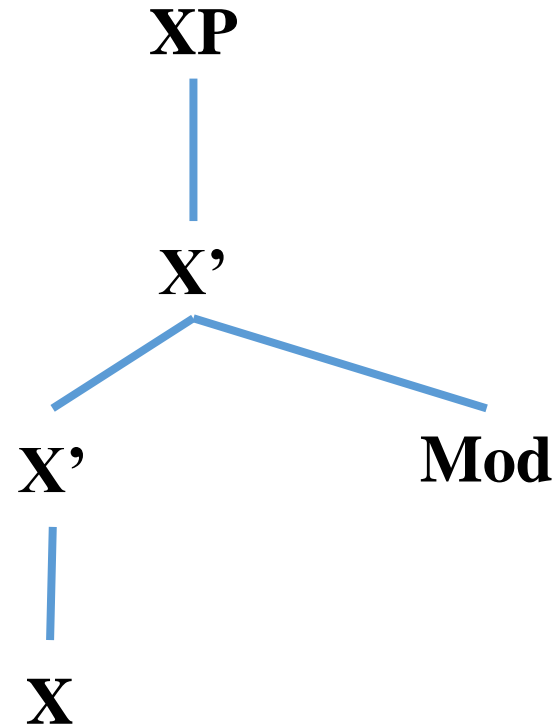
Phrase structure trees

3. Structure with two complements



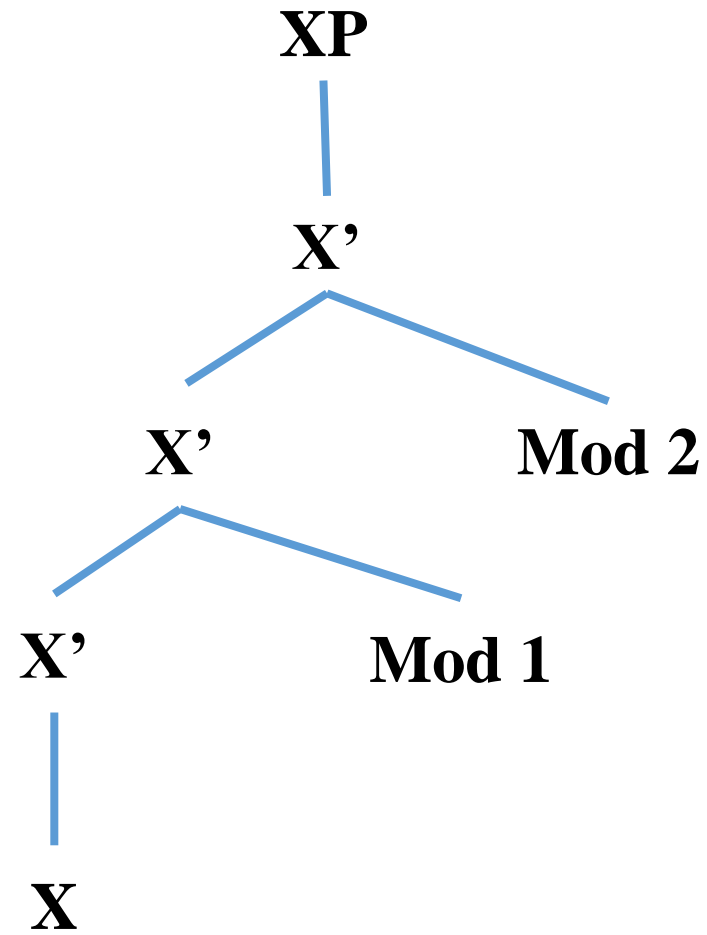
Phrase structure trees

4. Structure with one modifier



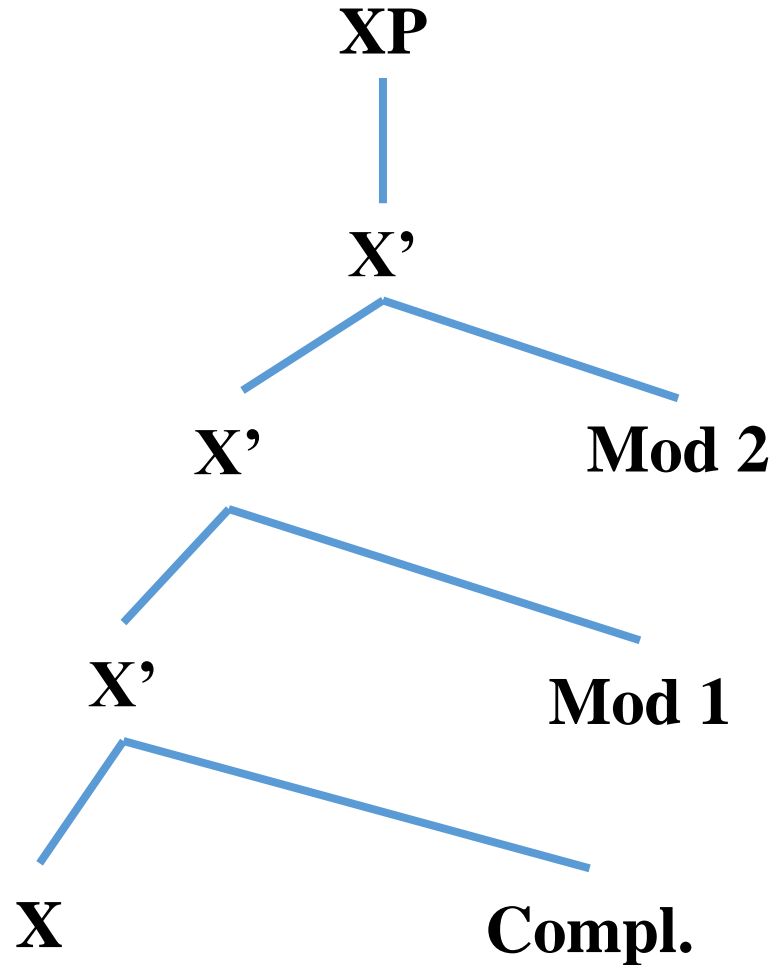
Phrase structure trees

5. Structure with two modifiers



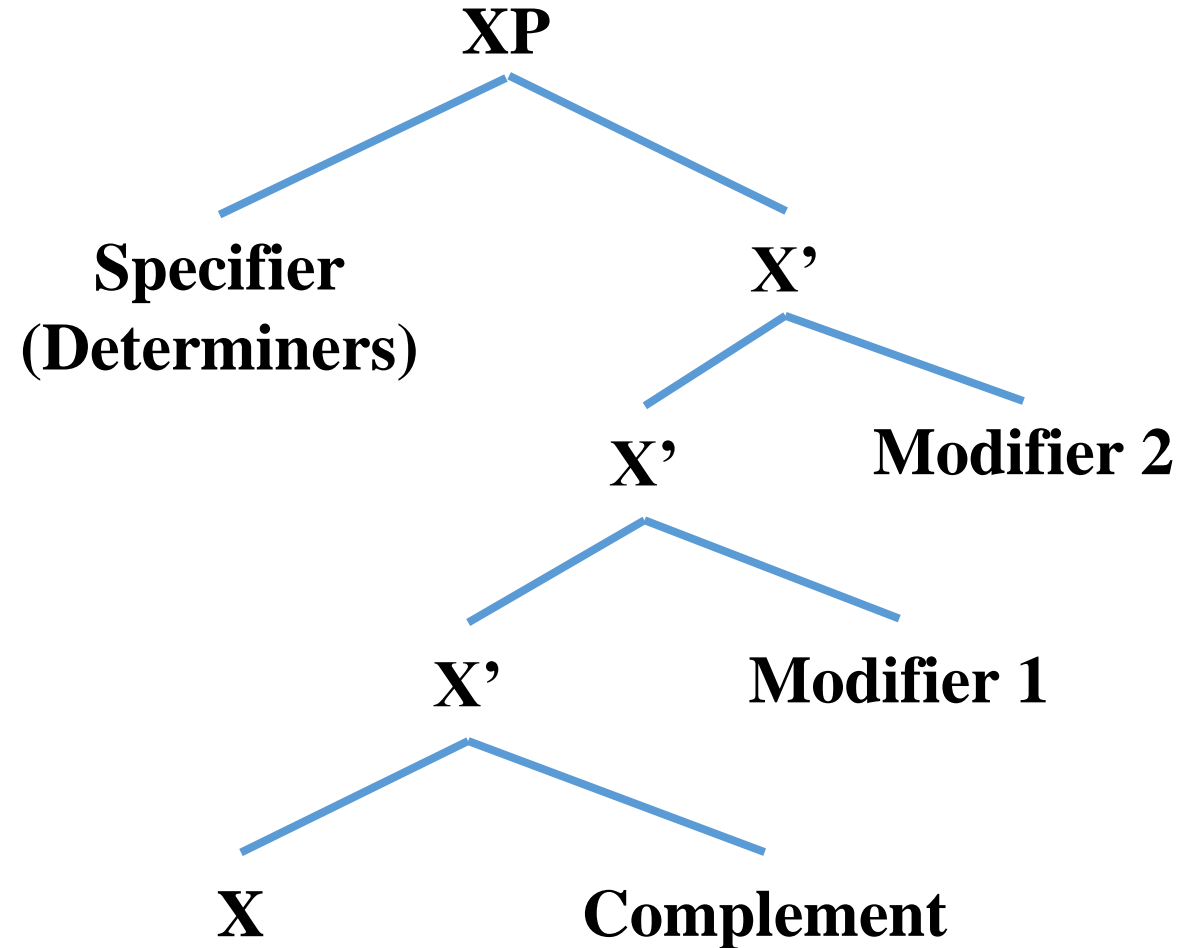
Phrase structure trees

6. Structure with two modifiers & one complement



Phrase structure trees

7. Basic X'-syntax schema



Drawing a tree diagram by...

...a web

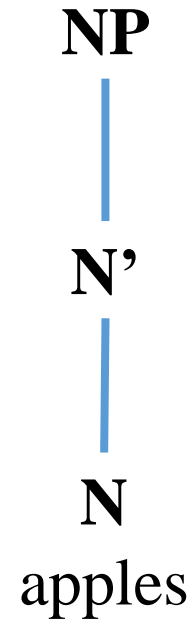
...Microsoft Word

Noun phrases

- NPs may function as subjects or as objects in sentences.
- An NP often contains a *determiner* (like *a* or *the*) and a noun, but it may also consist of a proper name, a pronoun, a noun without a determiner, or even a clause.
- Example:
 1. John found the puppy.
 2. He found the puppy.
 3. Boys love puppies.
 4. The puppy loved him.
 5. The puppy loved John.
 6. The girl that Professor Snape loved married the man of her dreams.

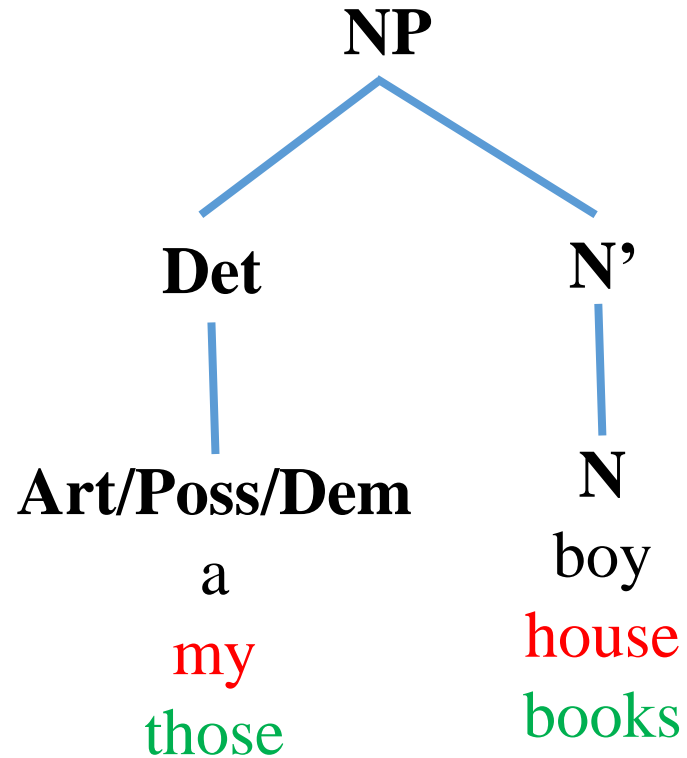
The structure of noun phrase

The minimal structure



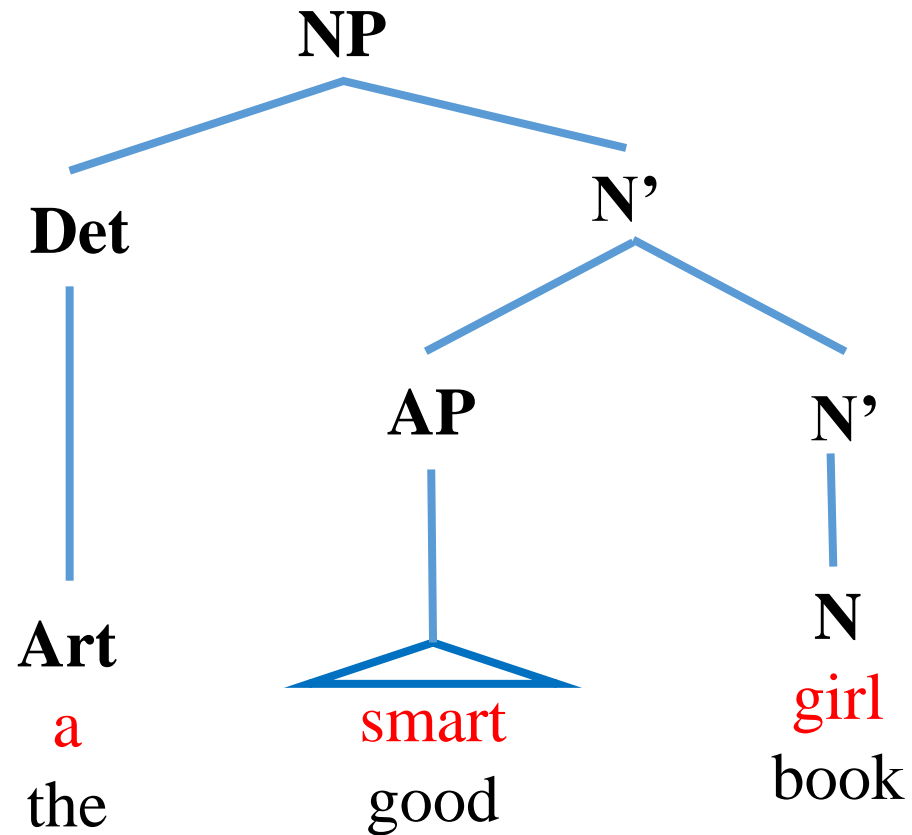
The structure of noun phrase

Determiners as specifiers of NP



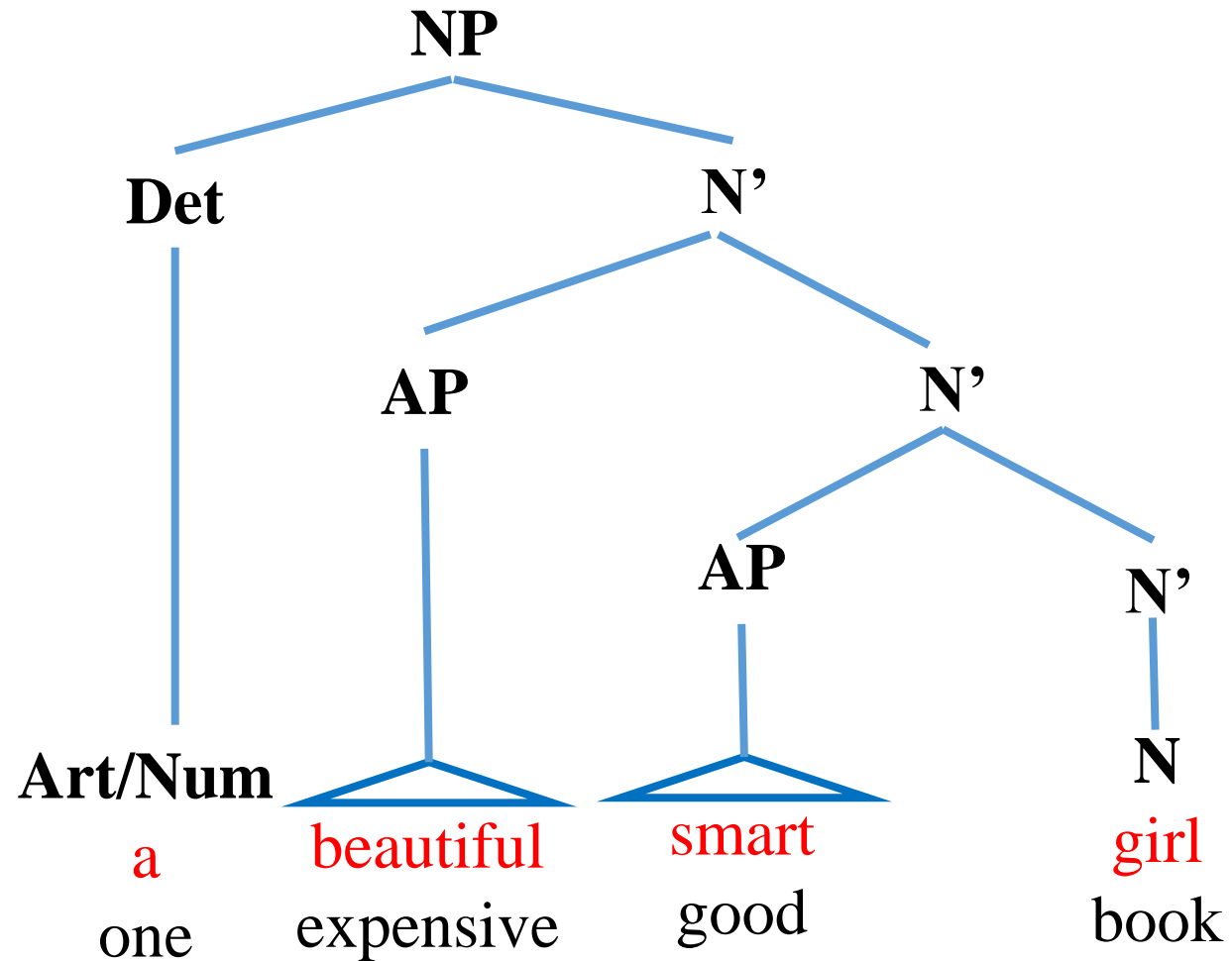
The structure of noun phrase

Structure with one pre-modifier



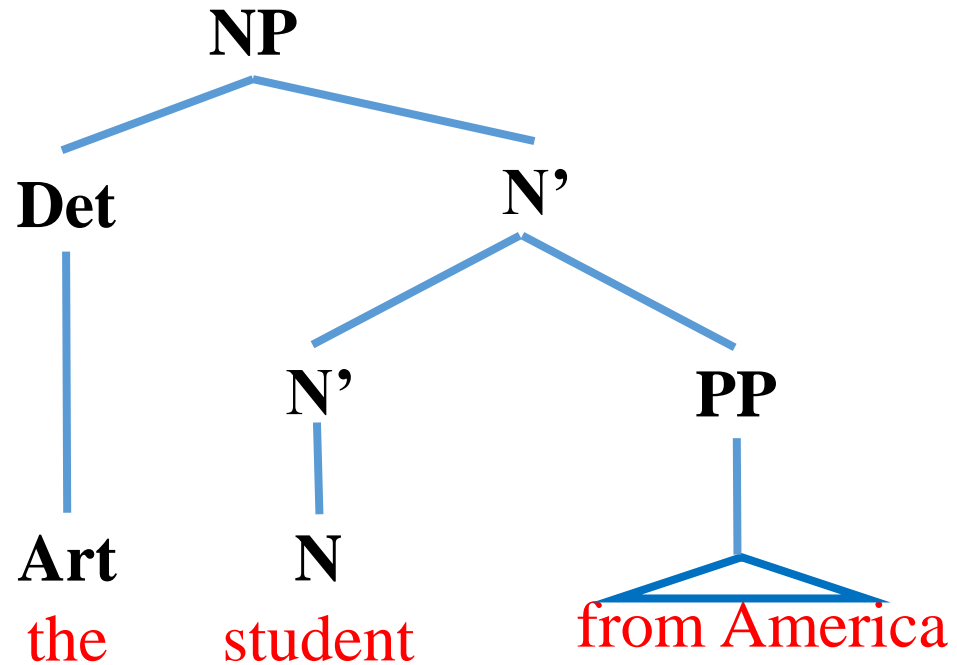
The structure of noun phrase

Structure with two pre-modifiers



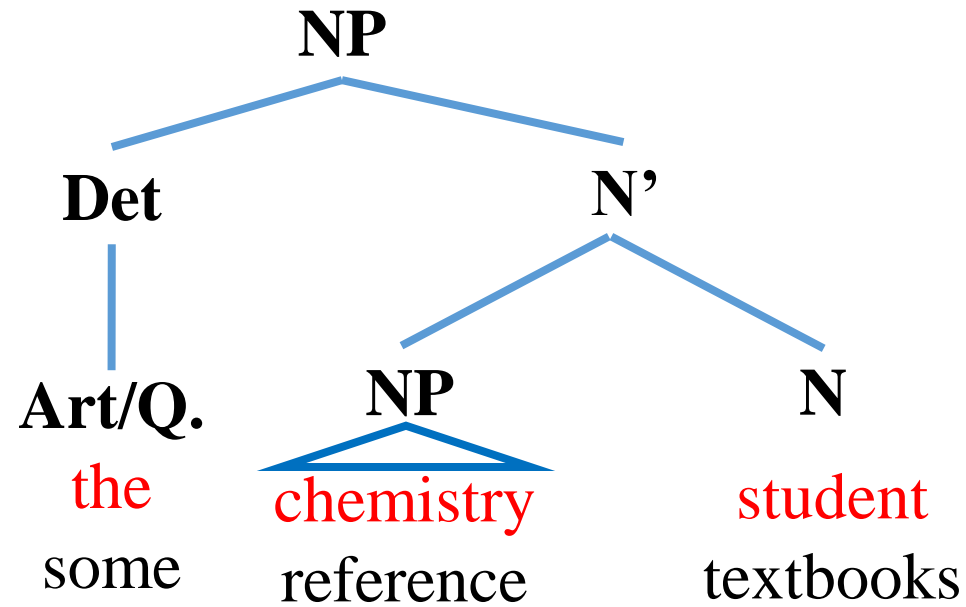
The structure of noun phrase

Structure with one post-modifier



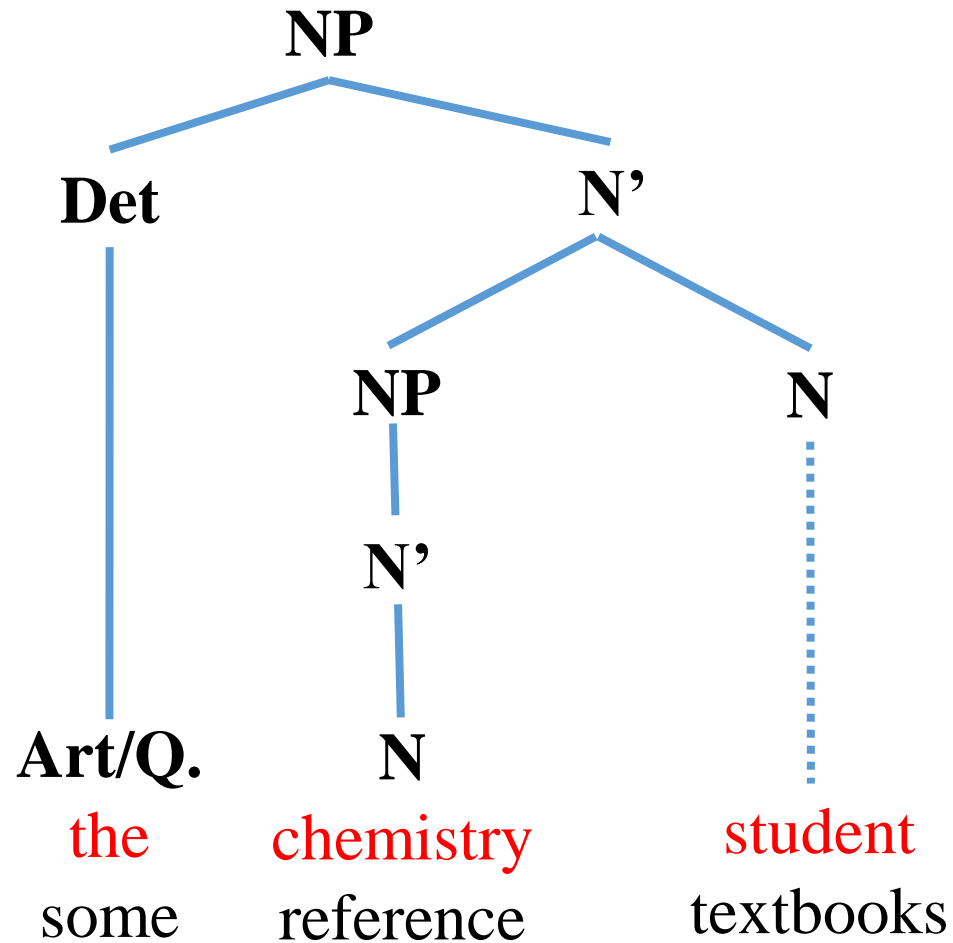
The structure of noun phrase

Structure with one prenominal complement



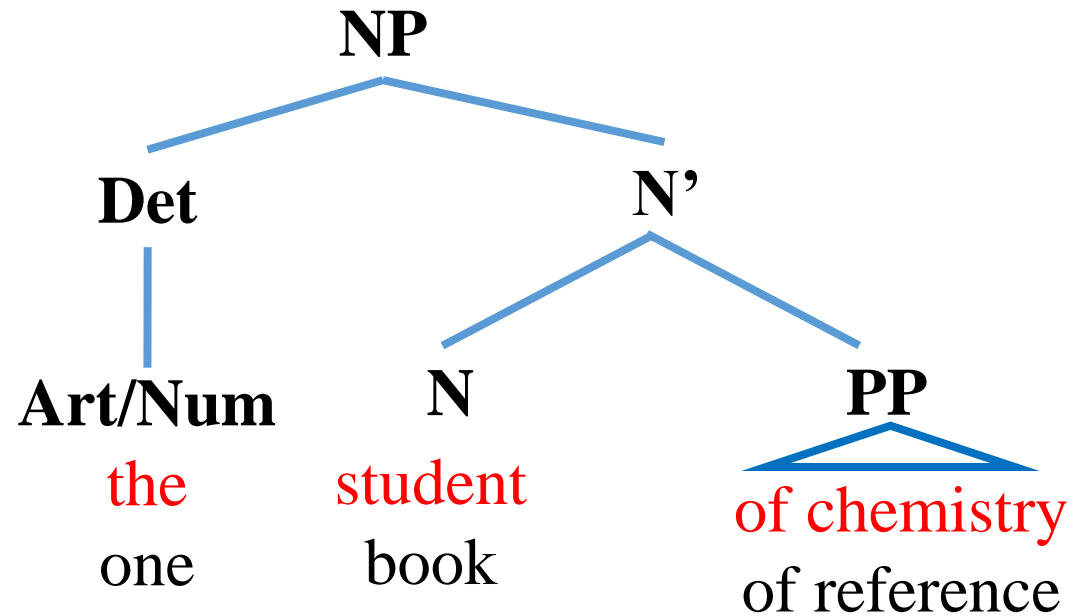
The structure of noun phrase

Structure with one prenominal complement



The structure of noun phrase

Structure with one post-nominal complement



Exercise - Draw the tree diagram of the following phrases

1. this car
2. an interesting play
3. my old white dog
4. a student from Thailand
5. some big bottles of milk
6. your reference books

Exercise - Draw the tree diagram of the following phrases

1. My parents
2. A new house
3. An old black cat
4. The teacher from Vietnam
5. Some small slices of bread
6. Your computer skills