

Chapter 3. Noun Phrases

1 Introduction

A noun phrase (NP) is a syntactic unit headed by a noun. An NP can consist of just a single noun (e.g., *city*), or it can be expanded by adding elements such as adjectives (e.g., *big city*), complements (e.g., *city of love*), and modifiers (e.g., *city around Barcelona*). In many frameworks, the internal structure of an NP reflects hierarchical organization rather than simple linear order, with the head noun projecting the phrase and other elements occupying specific structural positions. NPs play a central role in syntax because they typically function as arguments of verbs and prepositions (e.g. subjects, objects), and their form interacts with features such as case, gender, number, definiteness, and agreement, which vary systematically across languages. Semantically, an NP denotes a set of entities, i.e., a predicate of $\langle e, t \rangle$ type, see the semantics of *man* in (1) for an example.

$$(1) \llbracket \text{man} \rrbracket = \lambda x. [\text{MAN}(x)]$$

In this chapter, we introduce the features of case, gender and number in Catalan nouns. More information can be found in the following chapters.

2 Case

Case is an abstract syntactic feature on NPs (concretely, determined NPs or DPs) that marks their grammatical relationship to other elements in the clause.

Old Catalan (roughly up to the 14th-15th centuries) inherited a two-case system from Vulgar Latin, but Modern Catalan has lost it, and nouns are not inflected for case anymore. Cases are then marked primarily in two ways: a) Word order, and b) Prepositions.

2.1 Word order: Nominative and accusative

In Chapter 2, it is informed that the basic word order of Catalan is SVO. Nominative, which marks the subject of a sentence, and accusative, which marks the direct object, are therefore reflected in this way (at least for transitive verbs). See (2) for an example, where *ell* ‘he’ is the subject and *pomes* ‘apples’ is the direct object.

$$(2) \begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{Ell} & \text{va} & \text{menjar} & \text{un} & \text{pome.} \\ \text{he} & 3\text{SG.PST} & \text{eat} & \text{INDEF.M} & \text{apple.M} \\ & & & & \\ & & & & \text{'He ate an apple.'} \end{array}$$

2.2 Preposition *a*: Dative

Obliques are cases excluding nominative and accusative, e.g., dative, genitive, ablative, instrumental, comitative, locative, etc. These cases are all marked by prepositions in Catalan, which are highly connected to the meaning of prepositions. All cases except the dative are more lexically contentful than the nominative and accusative. Therefore, we only introduce the preposition *a*, which marks the indirect object (the dative case) of a sentence in (3), and leave others in other chapters.

$$(3) \begin{array}{ccccccccc} \text{Li} & \text{va} & \text{donar} & \text{un} & \text{llibre} & \text{a} & \text{en} & \text{Joan.} \\ 3\text{SG.DAT} & 3\text{SG.PST} & \text{give} & \text{INDEF.M} & \text{book.M} & \text{DAT} & \text{DEF.M} & \text{Joan} \\ & & & & & & & \\ & & & & & & & \text{'(S)he gave a book to Joan.'} \end{array}$$

3 Gender

Gender is an inherent morphosyntactic feature on nouns, not necessarily related to biological or social genders, that classifies nouns into different agreement classes. This agreement is reflected on other elements (e.g., adjectives, determiners, etc.) that must agree with the noun.

In Catalan, nouns are classified as masculine and feminine (though there exist neutral pronouns). Generally, masculine words end with -e, -i, -o, -u, and consonants, and feminine words end with -a and consonants, see (4).

- (4) a. masculine: *viatge* ‘travel’, *noi* ‘boy’, *piano* ‘piano’, *tabú* ‘tattoo’, *gel* ‘ice’
- b. feminine: *noia* ‘girl’, *nit* ‘night’

However, there exist counterexamples, see some examples in (5).

- (5) a. masculine: *dia* ‘day’, *mapa* ‘map’, *problema* ‘problem’
- b. feminine: *imatge* ‘image’, *crisi* ‘crisis’, *tribu* ‘tribe’

In some cases, the meanings of a word differ when it is used as masculine and feminine, see an example in (6).

- (6) a. masculine: *ordre* ‘order (command, sequence, arrangement, rule, public order)’, *donar un ordre* ‘to give an order (command)’
- b. feminine: *ordre* ‘order (tidiness, neatness, being in order)’, *tenir la casa en ordre* ‘to have the house in order/tidy’

4 Number

Number is a morphosyntactic feature that marks the cardinality of a NP (e.g., singular, dual, plural, etc.).

In Catalan, number is distinguished between singular and plural. Plural is marked by adding -s or -os / -es to the singular form of the masculine. It also shows agreement: determiners and adjectives match the noun in number. See a summary in Table 1 and examples in (7) - ()�.

Table 1: Plural in Catalan

	Masculine Plural	Feminine Plural
CANONICAL MARKER	-s	-es
WORDS ENDING WITH -ç, -x, -s	-os	-es

- (7) a. *noi* ‘boy’, *nois* ‘boys’
- b. *noia* ‘girl’, *noies* ‘girls’
- (8) a. *llibre* ‘book’, *llibres* ‘books’
- b. *casa* ‘house’, *cases* ‘houses’
- (9) a. *avenç* ‘breakthrough’, *avenços* ‘breakthroughs’
- b. *peix* ‘fish’, *peixos* ‘fishes’
- c. *gos* ‘dog’, *gossos* ‘dogs’
- d. *país* ‘country’, *països* ‘countries’
- e. *noi feliç* ‘happy boy’, *nois feliços* ‘happy boys’
- f. *noia feliç* ‘happy girl’, *noias felices* ‘happy girls’