CHAPTER TWO

THE NOUN PHRASE

1. Introduction

In Chapter 1, I presented an account of the semantic and syntactic properties of nouns and their modifiers. In Chapter 2, I deal with pragmatics and propose an analysis of various modifiers applied to different types of nouns. I have two objectives: firstly, to examine expansions that occur with nouns, and secondly, to look at the placement of the modifiers with respect to their governing nouns. The organisation of this chapter is as follows. In the introductory section 1, I present the concepts that will serve for an analysis of the ordering of the elements within noun phrases, namely factors that may affect the internal order of noun phrases: pragmatic aspects (section 1.1); values that adjectives or genitives can exhibit (1.2), and the contextual status of referents (1.3). In section 1.4 I deal with special arrangements, and in section 1.5, with a brief overview of the state of research, the objectives of the present chapter, and the method adopted. In section 1.6 I provide an overview of the nouns examined. The main study is divided into 9 sections, devoted to quantifying expressions (section 2), specification of a referent (section 3), description of a referent (section 4), evaluation of a referent (section 5), identification of a referent (section 6), expressions of possession (section 7), valency complements (section 8), optional complements (section 9), and complex noun phrases (section 10). General conclusions are formulated in section 11. A glossary of linguistic terms used is provided at the end of the book.

1.1. Pragmatic Functions of Noun Phrases and Their Components

In general, a modifier—adjective, numeral, genitive, prepositional phrase—may either function together with the governing noun and form a pragmatic unit with it, or have a pragmatic value of its own. For example, when Cato talks about fitting out a new farm, he advises the property owner to sell

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1 For more details concerning pragmatic functions and features, see Spevak (2010a: 39) with discussion and references. For question tests, ibid. pp. 35–36.
useless items. *Boves vetulos*—as well as the other noun phrases—form a pragmatic unit in (1); this sentence does not inform us about the quality of the entity but about what should be sold. We can also say that the phrase *boves vetulos* has as its underlying question *quem, quid? ‘who, what?’*; *lanam ‘wool’* without modifier answers the same implicit question (1a). These constituents are enumerated and function all as the (multiple) Focus of the sentence, i.e. they convey salient information. In contrast, the modifiers that are pragmatically significant can figure in answers concerning properties, for example in the passage from Plautus in (2). Answers are reduced to the adjectives elicited by *quali genere, quid fide, and quid factis*. If the answers were realised by noun phrases, which would be perfectly possible, the nouns would be contextually given and the adjectives on their own would convey salient information: *genere bono, fide bona, factis neque malis neque improbis*. Another good example of an adjective with the Focus function is given in (3).

(1)  Boves vetulos, armenta delicula, oves deliculas, lanam, pelles, plostrum vetus, ferramenta vetera ... et si quid aliud supersit, vendat.
     ‘Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools ... and whatever else is superfluous.’ (Cato *Agr.* 2.7)

(1a)  Quem, quod vendat? # Boves vetulos, armenta delicula, lanam ...

(2)  Dic mihi, *quali* me arbitrare *genere* prognatum? # *Bono.* # Quid fide? # *Bona.* # Quid factis? # *Neque malis neque improbis.*
     ‘Tell me, what kind of family do you think I come from? # A good one. # What about my reputation? # It’s good. # What about my behaviour? # Neither bad nor disreputable.’ (Pl. *Aul.* 212–213)

(3)  ‘*Magnas vero agere gratias Thais mihi?’ Satis erat respondere *magnas. Ingenites, inquit.*
     ‘You say that Thais thanks me very much?’ It would have been enough to reply ‘Yes, very much.’ ‘Enormously,’ he says.’ (Cic. *Amic.* 98; cf. Ter. *Eu* 391)

Like other sentence constituents, noun phrases may fulfil the pragmatic functions of Topic and Focus. In principle, every sentence is about something and is supposed to bring new information. **Topic** is the element about which a sentence gives information. The sentence in (4)—as well as the whole passage—is about a *fundus suburbanus* ‘a suburban farm’ and things it should have. **Focus** is the most informative part of a sentence. The status of a constituent can be verified with the help of a question associated to it. For example, *torcularia bona* ‘good presses’ answers the underlying question ‘what should the master have?’; Cato is talking about the equipment of a farm. In both cases, the adjectives in postposition are not pragmatically prominent; this point will be discussed in next section.