PART THREE

PHRASE STRUCTURE
CHAPTER NINE

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON PHRASE STRUCTURE

9.1 INTRODUCTION

A phrase is a word or a group of words that makes up a part of a clause, but does not constitute a clause in itself,\(^1\) that is to say that it does not express predication.\(^2\) It consists of a 'main word' together with its obligatory or optional expansions. This 'main word' may be called the 'head': A head is a single element in a phrase that characterizes the phrase as a whole.\(^3\) A phrase is the largest unit that has one word as its head;\(^4\) it is the maximal projection of that head.\(^5\)

In our investigation the concept of 'phrase atoms' or 'minimum units' plays an important role. We define phrase atoms as the smallest indivisible units of a phrase, i.e. those elements that cannot be subdivided into smaller units.\(^6\) Phrase atoms, like physical atoms, can have a complex internal structure. Thus there are phrase atoms of the type [Preposition-Noun] or [CstrNoun-Noun].\(^7\) The atoms are the smallest elements out of which larger constructions are built.

Phrase atoms can be extended by specifications or by other phrase atoms that are juxtaposed. This may lead to rather complex structures of phrases, consisting of one or more phrase atoms, specifications and parallel elements. On the basis of formal criteria we distinguish the following types of phrase extensions.\(^8\)

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\(^1\) On phrases that are not part of a clause see § 8.6; for the definition of 'clause' see § 16.1.
\(^2\) Even though it may contain embedded predication structures; cf. § 26.2.
\(^3\) Thus Matthews, *Dictionary*, 158.
\(^4\) Thus Matthews, *Dictionary*, 279.
\(^6\) Cf. Talstra–Sikkel "WIVU-Datenbank", 47–48: 'Mit diesem Begriff werden zwei Sachverhalte gekennzeichnet: zum einen sind Atome auf ihrer linguistischen Ebene nicht weiter teilbar; zum anderen sind sie – einzeln oder in Kombination – Bausteine höherer funktionaler Einheiten.'
\(^7\) Square brackets indicate the boundaries of a phrase atom.
\(^8\) Compare Dyk, *Data Preparation*, 146–147. Unlike Dyk, we prefer to keep apart phrases with s and prepositional phrases (cf. § 14.1) and to treat demonstratives as a