

## MODIFICATION VERSUS COMPLEMENTATION IN THE STRUCTURE OF ENGLISH ADJECTIVE PHRASES AND ADVERB PHRASES

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**Abstract** This article outlines the inconsistent ways in which reference grammars make the distinction between postmodification and complementation in the structure of English adjective phrases and adverb phrases, and attempts to provide a solution to this terminological quandary.

**Keywords** Complementation, Postmodification, Adjective Phrases, Adverb Phrases.

Besides the head, the central component on which all the other phrasal elements converge, the adjective phrase and the adverb phrase may contain dependent constituents that effect modification and/or complementation. Of these dependent phrasal elements, postmodifiers and complements are notoriously difficult to demarcate. When describing the structure of adjective phrases and adverb phrases, not all grammarians differentiate between postmodification and complementation, some confining the latter to subject complementation and object complementation in line with the definition given to the term “complement” by David Crystal – “an element of clause or sentence structure, traditionally associated with ‘completing’ the meaning specified by the verb,<sup>1</sup>” or by Stephan Gramley and Kurt-Michael Pätzold – “one kind of element which serves to complete the predication.”<sup>2</sup> Apart from this narrow-scope definition, there is, however, a wide-scope one, such as Michael Swan’s, according to which complements are words or expressions that

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DOI: 10.26424/philobib.2020.25.1.07

<sup>1</sup> David Crystal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Language* (London: Penguin Books, 1999 [1992]), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Stephan Gramley and Kurt-Michael Pätzold, *A Survey of Modern English* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 136.

complete the meaning of a verb, noun or adjective.<sup>3</sup> Ronald Wardhaugh uses a less specific and, obviously, more inclusive definition: a complement is “a constituent required to complete a construction<sup>4</sup>” and, thus, even complements of prepositions are covered by this rendition. Noel Burton-Roberts provides a more comprehensive account of dependency and function in the case of phrasal constituents: complements are obligatory, required by the head, which they usually follow to complete its meaning, whereas modifiers are optional and may either precede or follow the head, which can stand alone and, even in their absence, will still form a syntactically sound and semantically meaningful structure. Consequently, complementation is a two-way dependency, whilst modification is a one-way dependency.<sup>5</sup> The present article analyses the reasoning behind the inconsistent ways in which reference grammars **do** or **do not** make the distinction between postmodification and complementation in the structure of English adjective phrases and adverb phrases, in an attempt to provide a solution to this terminological quandary.

It is generally accepted that in the structure of an English adjective phrase there may be up to four structural elements which must appear in a fixed order: *premodifiers*, the modifying constituents that precede the head – these can be *adverbs* or *adverb phrases*, the head – expressed either by an adjective proper, or by an adjective originating from a participle, *postmodifiers* – usually the adverb **enough** or the adverb **indeed**<sup>6</sup> but other structures are included in this category by some linguists,<sup>7</sup> and complements in the form of comparative structures, phrases (prepositional phrases) and clauses (infinitive clauses, *-ing* clauses, relative clauses or nominal clauses), which bring more precise details about the head either directly or

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage. International Student's Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Wardhaugh, *Understanding English Grammar. A Linguistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 270.

<sup>5</sup> Noel Burton-Roberts, *Analysing Sentences. An Introduction to English Syntax* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1999, in the 13<sup>th</sup> lecture from his language course notes (HF ENG 111), when discussing adjectives and adverbs, Nils-Lennart Johannesson clearly made the following distinction between modifiers and complements in the structure of adjective phrases: being the post-position equivalents of the *premodifiers* preceding the head adjective or the head adverb, the degree adverbs **enough** and **indeed** are deemed **postmodifiers**, whilst the other types of constituents that may appear after the head of the adjective/adverb phrase are called complements. See <http://www.orrmlum.net/orproj/info/nlj.htm> Last accessed on 21 June, 2009. This view is also shared by Angela Downing and Philip Locke, in their *English Grammar. A University Course* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 509.

<sup>7</sup> There are several linguists, to be mentioned later in this article, who classify some prepositional phrases, infinitive clauses and subordinate clauses as **postmodifiers** rather than complements. The reasoning behind this taxonomy, though seldom transparent, will be analysed and assessed.

by completing the meaning of another dependent element in the phrase.

Likewise, in the structure of an English adverb phrase there may be up to four structural elements, which must appear in a fixed order: *premodifiers*, the modifying constituents that precede the head – normally *adverbs of degree* (either *intensifying* or *focusing adverbs* – *only, just, relatively, quite, really*, etc.), the head – expressed by an adverb, **postmodifiers** – usually the adverb **enough** or the adverb **indeed** and complements, in the form of comparative structures, prepositional phrases, infinitive clauses, relative clauses or nominal clauses, which bring more precise details about the head either directly or by completing the meaning of another dependent element in the phrase.

Certain *premodifiers*, for instance *so, too, as, more* or other comparatives, require dependents of their own, prompting different analyses of the adjective and adverb phrases that feature these structures:

- 1) Ed was *so* tall **that he could see over the wall**.
- 2) It was *more* useful **than I had expected**.
- 3) It was *as* long **as six feet**.
- 4) Ed was *too* sleepy **to concentrate**.<sup>8</sup>

The simplest pattern of analysis is put forward mainly by linguists who do not operate with the postmodification versus complementation distinction, analysing all the post-head constituents as **postmodifiers**: László Budai, Geoffrey Leech, Margaret Deuchar and Robert Hoogenraad, Marcella Frank, John Eastwood, etc. Even Sidney Greenbaum adhered to this interpretation<sup>9</sup> both in a book published on his own in 1996 and in the work co-authored with Gerald Nelson in 2002. This is utterly surprising, given that in 1985 and 1990 Greenbaum had been one of the authors of two other grammar books which adopt the fourth pattern of analysis,<sup>10</sup> namely the one where such structures are said to effect complementation. But in *The Oxford English Grammar* and in *An Introduction to*

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<sup>8</sup> These examples are to be found in Rodney Huddleston, *Introduction to the Grammar of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 308. Huddleston's examples are numbered 9-12, but here the counting starts at 1, since they are the first four examples mentioned in this article.

<sup>9</sup> Sidney Greenbaum, *The Oxford English Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 288, 295 and, respectively Sidney Greenbaum and Gerald Nelson, *An Introduction to English Grammar* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 67, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985) and Sidney Greenbaum, Randolph Quirk, *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*, (London: Longman, 1990).

*English Grammar*, since complementation is not even acknowledged, the structures in bold are simply called **postmodifiers**.<sup>11</sup>

A similar type of analysis belongs to Rodney Huddleston, although he does make the postmodifier versus complement distinction. One of his earlier works, the 1994 *Introduction to the Grammar of English*, displays the linguist's dilemma and rationalises his taxonomical choice, offering a tentative explanation as to why these post-head constituents should be viewed neither as complements, nor as part of discontinuous modification but merely as separate modifiers, namely **postmodifiers**. Huddleston starts by acknowledging that, in such cases, "the post-head modifier is closely linked to a pre-head modifier."<sup>12</sup> In the absence of the premodifiers, the post-head structures cannot be used: "There is thus something to be said for analysing the subordinate clauses here as dependents of *so* and *more* (rather than of the adjectives), with the AdjPs each containing a single discontinuous modifier. I have preferred to take the clauses as separate modifiers of the adjective for two reasons."<sup>13</sup>

The first reason that Huddleston mentions involves the equivalence between the analytic comparative (AC) in sentence 2 and the inflectional comparative (IC) of a sentence like "It was **longer than I had expected**": if "longer" gets replaced by "long", the post-head constituent has to be dropped as well, but here "the latter does not form a syntactic constituent with the comparative inflection: within the framework we have adopted, the ICs of *longer than I had expected* could not be long + *-er than I had expected*, because *-er* is part of the word *longer*."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it can be argued that just like *too* and *so* require complementation so do *as* and *more*, and so will a comparative inflection attached to the head. The complement is not licensed by the head itself, meaning that the post-head constituent is a postmodifier in the economy of the whole phrase in the case of "It was **longer than I had expected**" and in sentences 1 to 4 the situation is similar, only that each of the respective postmodifiers is part of a discontinuous syntactic unit, sentences 1 to 4 displaying split modification.

The second reason given by Huddleston is the difficulty encountered in distinguishing "the discontinuous construction from that where there is a post-head dependent of the adjective."<sup>15</sup> He insists that although in sentences 3 and 4 dropping the premodifiers *too* and *so* would require that the post-head elements be dropped as well, by simply changing these sentences' lexical content to "He was *too* old **to be doing that kind of work**." and, respectively, "She was *as* slim **as a reed**." we obtain similar structures where, however, the premodifiers can be omitted whilst keeping

<sup>11</sup> Greenbaum Sidney, *The Oxford English Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 288, 295.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 308-309.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

the postmodifiers in place.<sup>16</sup> Actually, this omission, though possible, is a mark of informality. The formal register still requires the presence of the premodifiers, and only the informal register allows for omissions: “He was old **to be doing that kind of work.**/ She was slim **as a reed.**” Consequently, Huddleston’s arguments fail to invalidate the discontinuous modification hypothesis.

The second pattern is preferred by those researchers who acknowledge complementation but argue that with comparative structures and with some types of infinitive constructions instances of discontinuous (or split) modification may occur. The attributive adjective phrase is discontinuous when its head and all its premodifiers appear before the head of the noun phrase it modifies, while structures like the infinitive clause or the comparative clause follow the head-noun that the adjective phrase modifies.

Due to an extremely rare condition called Superior Autobiographical Memory, Rebecca Sharrock has got a *much more* impressive recollection of past events **than anyone else’s**.

As Hilde Hasselgård, Stig Johansson and Per Lysvåg explain, if the head-adjective is followed by a clause and premodified by *too*, *such* or *so*, to which I would add *more*, *as*, or some other comparative, then the adjective phrase will appear as split<sup>17</sup>:

This was *too* gradual a change **for most people to notice**. (infinitive clause as postmodifier)<sup>18</sup>

This was *so* gradual a change **that it actually escaped most people’s notice**. (nominal clause as postmodifier)

This was *such* a gradual change **that it actually escaped most people’s notice**. (nominal clause as postmodifier)

Even when the adjective phrase appears in a predicative, rather than in an attributive position and, thus, there is no noun to cause a split, it can be considered that discontinuous modification occurs inside the adjective phrase and “*much more ... than anyone else’s*” is a case in point, where the head adjective appears between two segments belonging to one and the same structure which effects modification in the economy of the adjective phrase:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hilde Hasselgård, Stig Johansson and Per Lysvåg, *English Grammar: Theory and Use* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001), 232.

<sup>18</sup> Here “for” is not a preposition but a subordinating conjunction and “most people” is, thus, not a complement of preposition, but the subject of the infinitive clause.

Due to an extremely rare condition called Superior Autobiographical Memory, Rebecca Sharrock's recollection of past events is *much more* impressive **than anyone else's**.

The following adjective phrases can also be analysed as containing split modification:

This change was *too* gradual **for most people to notice**.

This change was *so* gradual **that it actually escaped most people's notice**.

Just like in the case of adjective phrases, the presence of certain premodifiers triggers cases of discontinuous modification inside the adverb phrase as well. Thus, with comparative structures and with some types of infinitive constructions such instances of discontinuous modification may occur. The adverb phrase is discontinuous when its head and all its premodifiers are separated from the **postmodification** by another phrase. As Hilde Hasselgård, Stig Johansson and Per Lysvåg point out, if the head-adverb is premodified by *too* or *so* and followed by a clause<sup>19</sup> or if the adverbial structure is split by one or more prepositional phrases,<sup>20</sup> then the adverb phrase will often be discontinuous. Split modification also occurs, I would add, if the head of the adverb phrase is modified by *more*, *as*, or by another comparative:

We arrived *too* late at the scene of the crime **to be able to prevent it from being contaminated**. (infinitive clause as postmodifier)

Jane explained the situation *so* clearly to everyone **that there was no one left with the slightest shadow of doubt in mind as to her reasons for resigning**. (nominal clause as postmodifier)

Two of the best anti-theist philosophers, Daniel Dennett and Michael Martin, have spoken *more* persuasively during this evening's conference **than at any time in their debating endeavours**. (comparative structure as postmodifier)

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins explained the gradual nature of response to selective pressures *so* magnificently on Friday night at Oxford College **that it seems appalling to have to cancel his next speech just to please some religious fundamentalists**. (nominal clause as postmodifier)

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<sup>19</sup> Hilde Hasselgård, Stig Johansson and Per Lysvåg, *English Grammar: Theory and Use* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001), 235.

<sup>20</sup> Hasselgård, Johansson and Lysvåg, see *ibid.*, state that "long" prepositional phrases cause such splits but, on the one hand, there is no specification as to what exactly "long" means when applied to a prepositional phrase and, on the other hand, the split actually occurs regardless of the prepositional phrase's length.

In these examples, the positioning of the prepositional phrases – “at the scene of the crime”, “to everyone”, “during this evening’s conference”, “on Friday night” and “at Oxford College” – engenders discontinuity in the adverb phrases. In none of these cases is the prepositional phrase an integral part of the adverb phrase, since it could easily be moved, with no change of meaning, and placed in a different position (mid position or front position). Nevertheless, even when there is no prepositional phrase to cause a split, it can be considered that discontinuous modification occurs inside the adverb phrase, if the head adverb appears between two segments belonging to one and the same structure which effects modification in the economy of the phrase:

We arrived at the scene of the crime *too* late **to be able to prevent it from being contaminated**.

Jane explained the situation to everyone *so* clearly **that there was no one left with the slightest shadow of doubt in mind as to her reasons for resigning**.

During this evening’s conference, two of the best anti-theist philosophers, Daniel Dennett and Michael Martin, have spoken *more* persuasively **than at any time in their debating endeavours**.

On Friday night at Oxford College, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins explained the gradual nature of response to selective pressures *so* magnificently **that it seems appalling to have to cancel his next speech just to please some religious fundamentalists**.

The third pattern of analysis is employed by linguists who, like Ronald Wardhaugh, do distinguish between modification and complementation but view the latter as merely a sub-category of the former.<sup>21</sup> Wardhaugh fails to draw a clear-cut distinction between the two, since he analyses “a much larger car **than ours**”<sup>22</sup> and “earlier **than we expected**”<sup>23</sup> as instances of postmodification, but states that “happier than he expected” and “bigger than the one he had owned before” contain complements<sup>24</sup>. Even Hasselgård, Johansson and Lysvåg, who acknowledge discontinuous modification in the structure of adjective phrases and in that of adverb phrases, seem to regard complementation as a special kind of postmodification, or even the other way around, since they mention that adverbs which precede the adjective “are called modifiers”, whereas phrases and clauses

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald Wardhaugh, *Understanding English Grammar. A Linguistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 48-49 and 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

which follow the adjective “are called complements of the adjective.”<sup>25</sup> This particular interpretation is rather confusing and does little to clarify the workings of dependency and function in the case of adjective phrases and adverb phrases.

And, finally, a fourth pattern of analysis is provided by linguists who prefer the term complementation or even indirect complementation to account for such post-head elements. Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy acknowledge that some adjective phrases contain discontinuous structures, “one part pre-head, the other post-head”, due to the fact that degree adverbs like *so*, *too*, or *as* “need a complement to complete their meaning.”<sup>26</sup> This complement, they explain, can be expressed by a clause or a phrase and follows the head adjective.<sup>27</sup> A more accurate analysis, however, would acknowledge that the post-head structure **postmodifies the head adjective** while complementing the degree adverb that effects the *premodification* in the respective adjective phrase. Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum’s analysis is based on the notion of indirect complementation. Indirect complements are licensed not by the head adjective, but by its *premodifier* or by its suffix having the form of a comparative inflection: “This is still *too* hot to drink./ They were so small you could hardly see them./ The bill wasn’t *as* large as we had expected./ I’m *fonder of them than you are*.”<sup>28</sup> According to Huddleston and Pullum, as this last example illustrates, an indirect complement (“than you are”) can combine with a direct one (“of them”).<sup>29</sup> Even the postmodifier **enough** can license an indirect complement, as in “careful **enough with money**/ good **enough for most purposes**/ old **enough to know better**/ fond **enough of them to make this sacrifice**”, since, as Huddleston and Pullum pertinently point out, the constituent segmentation in the last example must be “fond **enough** + of them + to make this sacrifice”, because a complement such as of them must be placed “between **enough** and the indirect complement licensed by **enough**.”<sup>30</sup>

The four disparate interpretation patterns outlined so far with reference to adjective and adverb phrases featuring certain premodifiers which require dependents of their own, bring to light terminological problems that seem to prevail even in the cases where no such instances of discontinuous modification occur. As mentioned above, Budai, Frank, Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad, Eastwood, and

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<sup>25</sup> Hilde Hasselgård, Stig Johansson and Per Lysvåg, *English Grammar: Theory and Use* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001), 219.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy, *Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide to Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 441.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 547.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 549.



others do not even attempt to single out complementation items in the case of adjective and adverb phrases, viewing all post-modifying constituents as forming postmodification, thus employing the narrow-scope definition of the term “complement”, one that even Swan had favoured<sup>31</sup> in his *Practical English Usage* of 1980, changing his approach only in the later editions of his work, starting with 1995.

According to László Budai, it is not only the adverb **enough** that can postmodify adjectives, but also comparative and nominal clauses, as well as infinitive clauses<sup>32</sup> and prepositional phrases: “Is it good **enough?**/ It is *less* cold **than it was yesterday.**/ We are glad **that we came.**/ We are glad **to come.**/ He was ashamed **of his behaviour.**”<sup>33</sup> Thus, all the items following the head of the adjective phrase are viewed as postmodifiers. No analysis of adverb phrases is provided by Budai, but Geoffrey Leech advances a modifier-centred analysis that goes across the board, being applied to the constituents of both adjective and adverb phrases.<sup>34</sup> The same is true of Geoffrey Leech, Margaret Deuchar and Robert Hoogenraad, as shown in their examples of prepositional phrases – “*rather too* hot **for comfort**,”<sup>35</sup> of comparative clauses and of nominal clauses acting as postmodifiers in adjective phrases – “He’s *less* noisy **than his sister was at his age.**”<sup>36</sup> and “I am afraid **that the Yorkshire pudding has collapsed.**”<sup>37</sup> The adverbs **enough** and **indeed** are also classified as postmodifiers, in both adjective phrases and adverb phrases, the latter type of phrase having the same structure as the former, with the obvious exception of the head, which must be an adverb: “*rather too* quickly **for comfort**”<sup>38</sup>. It is, thus, clearly stated that, in both adjective phrases and adverb phrases, prepositional phrases “act as postmodifiers”<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 203.

<sup>32</sup> László Budai calls them “infinitive phrases” in his *Gramatica engleză. Teorie și exerciții* (București: Editura Teora, 1997), 380 and so does Marcella Frank in her *Modern English. A Practical Reference Guide* (New Jersey: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1993), 323-345. The terminology used in this article, however, takes into account the function of the infinitive forms in the economy of the sentence. Thus, they are classified as infinitive phrases (if they “act like nouns or premodify the head of a Noun Phrase”) or as infinitive clauses (if they “postmodify the head of a Noun Phrase” or act like adverbs, “whether they are part of the complementation in an Adjective Phrase or in an Adverb Phrase, or simply show purpose, result, etc.”). See Alina Preda, “On Phrases and Clauses,” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Philologia*, 59 (LIX), (2014): 25- 35.

<sup>33</sup> László Budai, *Gramatica engleză. Teorie și exerciții* (București: Editura Teora, 1997), 379-380.

<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey Leech, *An A-Z English Grammar and Usage* (Essex: Longman, 1991), 18-25 and 88-89.

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Leech, Margaret Deuchar and Robert Hoogenraad, *English Grammar for Today. A New Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006 [1982]), 76.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

John Eastwood<sup>40</sup> mentions that “**enough** comes after the adjective or adverb it modifies,<sup>41</sup>” yet he also fails to acknowledge adjective and adverb complementation<sup>42</sup> and in what regards nominal clauses he merely states that “we can use a *that*-clause after some adjectives: I’m glad **that you enjoyed the meal.**”<sup>43</sup> Thus, neither adjective complementation nor adverb complementation is openly acknowledged, and the specification that nominal clauses “can be a complement of *be*” (“The truth is that I don’t get on with my flat-mate.”) suggests that he favours the narrow scope definition of the term “complement”<sup>44</sup>. As for *Collins Cobuild English Usage* of 1993, since only the grammatical items that offer “more information about the subject of the clause” and those that “describe the object of a clause” are considered complements here<sup>45</sup>, in line with this narrow scope view of complementation, the entry dedicated to ‘*that*’-clauses details the use of these particular grammatical structures as complements after ‘*be*’ (“The important thing is that we love each other.”). Additionally, it is stated that they can be used after adjectives “which indicate someone’s feelings or beliefs to say what fact those feelings or beliefs relate to” but there appears no specific mention of the term “adjective complementation”, only several examples: “She was sure that he meant it./ He was frightened that something terrible might be said.”<sup>46</sup>

Ronald Wardhaugh makes no mention of complementation in the case of the adverb phrase, merely stating that the adverb “may be modified in various ways”, not just by another adverb – “well **enough**”, but also by a prepositional phrase – “worst **of all**” or by a clause – “earlier **than we expected**”<sup>47</sup>. Confusion, however, mars his adjective phrase description. Wardhaugh first mentions that there is “considerable variety” in the complements that are needed, additional constituents “to complete the whole construction” and gives examples of prepositional phrases – “conscious of the fact/ compatible with the system/ amazed at the consequences”, clauses introduced by “*that*” – “sure that I knew/ amazed that we came”, comparisons – “happier than he expected”, and infinitives – “certain to do it/ wrong to say so/ quick to take offense/ difficult to please”<sup>48</sup>. He then continues to say that “variations and combinations” can occur in the structure of

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<sup>40</sup> John Eastwood, *Oxford Guide to English Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 345-358.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>45</sup> *Collins Cobuild English Usage* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 145.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

<sup>47</sup> Ronald Wardhaugh, *Understanding English Grammar. A Linguistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 60.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

adjective phrases, in terms of both premodification and postmodification, illustrating this assertion with the very items previously said to constitute complementation, namely prepositional phrases, infinitive clauses and comparative clauses – “so *very* knowledgeable **about it/ too** cold a day **to go fishing/ a *much*** larger car **than ours**.<sup>49</sup>” No clear distinction is, therefore, drawn here between postmodification and complementation, the most likely explanation being that, for Wardhaugh, the latter is merely a sub-category of the former.

Gerald Delahunty and James Garvey fail to acknowledge the potential existence of complementation in the structure of the adverb phrase: “The following formula encapsulates the functional properties of AdvPs: (Modifier) + Head [In formulae like this, parentheses indicate optional elements.]<sup>50</sup>” Nevertheless, they state that, from a functional point of view, adjective phrases “may be analyzed as: (Modifier) + Head + (Complement). The modifiers may be either intensifiers or degree adverbs, just as in AdvPs; the complements may be PPs, finite clauses, or infinitivals.<sup>51</sup>” Strangely enough, both types of dependents are viewed as optional, even though, a few pages earlier, the authors of this work had pointed out the difference between modifiers – which are not “required or implied by the words, phrases, or sentences they modify,<sup>52</sup>” and complements – which are grammatically expected to occur, their presence being demanded by a particular “element in an expression.<sup>53</sup>” This element, the authors state, can be a verb, a preposition or a noun, so adjectives and adverbs are conspicuously absent from the list. In light of this omission, it is possible to infer that their inaccurate description of adjective phrase complementation derives from the use of the term “complement” on merely positional grounds, which does not allow for a distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory post-head dependents.

Improving on his earlier work, Michael Swan explains, in his 1996 *International Student’s Edition of Practical English Usage*, that there is “a wider sense” in which the word “complement” is used, so as “to add something to a verb, noun or adjective to complete its meaning.<sup>54</sup>” Here are some of his examples featuring adjective complements: “I’m interested in learning to fly./ Alan was very

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>50</sup> Gerald P. Delahunty and James J. Garvey, *The English Language. From Sound to Sense* (Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and West Lafayette, Indiana: Parlor Press, 2010), 280.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage. International Student’s Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 127.

critical of the plan.<sup>55</sup>” As for **enough**, it is mentioned as a postmodifier of adjectives and adverbs: “Is it warm **enough** for you?/ You are not driving fast **enough**.<sup>56</sup>”

In Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik’s *A Communicative Grammar of English* of 1993, adjective complementation is more clearly acknowledged: “She’ll be glad (that) you are coming./ She’ll be glad to hear the good news./ She’ll be glad of your success.<sup>57</sup>” Leech and Svartvik state that “the only postmodifying adverb” in the case of adjectives and adverbs is **enough**<sup>58</sup>.

In the structure of adjective and adverb phrases, Quirk et. al. view **enough** as postmodifier – stating that an adjective postmodified by **enough** or premodified by *too* or *so* “can be separated from its complementation if the modified adjective is placed before the indefinite (or zero) article of the noun phrase: She is brave **enough** a student to attempt the course.<sup>59</sup>” and explaining that when performing the function of modifier “the adverb generally premodifies, except that **enough** can only postmodify.<sup>60</sup>” Comparative structures, infinitive clauses and prepositional phrases are considered complements: “They have a house larger than yours./ The boys easiest to teach were in my class./ I know an actor suitable for the part.<sup>61</sup>”

In their 2005 *Student’s Introduction to English Grammar*, Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum explain that, just like complements in clause structure “have to be licensed by the head verb,” complements in phrase structure have to be licensed by the head of the phrase, whereas modifiers “are the default type of dependent, lacking the above special features.<sup>62</sup>” Huddleston and Pullum do not, however, explicitly state what the difference is between complements and postmodifiers. Although “old **enough**” is said to contain a modifier,<sup>63</sup> the word **enough** is later discussed together with prepositional phrases, infinitive clauses and comparative structures, all termed **post-head dependents**: “She was cautious to excess./ She was devoted to her children./ The house was big **enough**./ The result was better than expected.<sup>64</sup>” Moreover, in the structure of adverb phrases dependents expressed by prepositional phrases are sometimes viewed as

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 127-128.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Communicative Grammar of English* (Essex: Longman, 1993), 220.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 202-203.

<sup>59</sup> Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985), 420-421.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>62</sup> Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, *A Student’s Introduction to English Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2005] 2007), 83.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 121.

complements (“Purchase of State vehicles is handled similarly to all State purchases./ Happily for the boys, the class was cancelled.”) and at other times as **postmodifiers** (“They behaved badly **in the extreme.**”). Although not mentioned, the reason for this distinction may be that in the first two examples the prepositional phrases are compulsory, whereas the omission of the prepositional phrase in the last example would result neither in ungrammaticality, nor in meaninglessness.<sup>65</sup> What is more, it could be rephrased using a *premodifier* as “They behaved *extremely* badly”.

Surprisingly, in earlier works authored by Huddleston and Pullum these issues are dealt with in a more explicit manner. Thus, in Huddleston’s 1994 *Introduction to the Grammar of English* the characteristic features displayed by complements are, at first, outlined starting from the example “Ed is **fond of Kim**”, where the adjective complement of Kim is expressed by a prepositional phrase (PP). The adjective **fond** takes a complement for both semantic and syntactic reasons. Semantically speaking, it is a two-place semantic predicate that requires two arguments, whereas syntactically it dictates the choice of preposition (it could be replaced by adjectives like **afraid** but not by **keen** or **sorry**) and it requires the presence of the prepositional phrase. However, the author then explains that the cases of adjectives that require complements are rare, giving other examples such as “**afraid of the dark**”, “**keen on the idea**” and “**sorry for the inconvenience**”, where “the parenthesised PP complements are not syntactically obligatory.” Nevertheless, we must note that these are still classified as complements.<sup>66</sup>

The distinction between the prepositional phrases that function as complements and those that function as modifiers appears later in the book: “**similar to the other one**” features a complement, whereas “**tall for his age**” contains a postmodifier, the explanation being that where the prepositional phrase is “a complement, rather than adjunct or modifier, the choice of preposition is often determined or severely limited by the verb, adjective or noun head to which the PP is complement.”<sup>67</sup> Another structure that can appear either as a complement or as a postmodifier is the infinitive clause. At first, the following four types of infinitival complementation are provided: “Ed was keen to see the manuscript./ Ed was likely to see the manuscript./ The dye was ready to use./ The dye was easy to use.”<sup>68</sup> There are some examples of **postmodifiers** as well, for instance “Ed was *too* sleepy **to concentrate.**/ Ed was *rather* young **to send on such a mission.**/ It was warm **to be wearing an overcoat.**”<sup>69</sup> Using the examples “He was anxious to be a minister.” and “He was young **to be a minister.**”, Huddleston explains that whilst the complement

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>66</sup> Rodney Huddleston, *Introduction to the Grammar of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 305.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 308.

corresponds semantically “to an argument of the adjectival semantic predicate”, the modifier is “concerned with the specification of degree.”<sup>70</sup> The linguist acknowledges, however, that drawing a clear-cut distinction between complements and modifiers is an extremely challenging task since, even in what regards the above-mentioned complements, “The dye was ready to use” and “The dye was easy to use”, it would be possible, for example, to differentiate between them “as involving a complement and modifier respectively.”<sup>71</sup> Yet this statement is not further developed so as to illustrate how and why such a distinction could be drawn in the case of these two sentences. The following comparative constructions are viewed as containing **postmodifiers**, “Ed was so tall **that he could see over the wall.**/ It was *more* useful **than I had expected.**/ It was *as long as* **six feet.**<sup>72</sup>” and subordinate clauses are seen as realising complementation: “Ed was angry that he had gone./ I am unsure whether she can do it.”<sup>73</sup>

The 2002 *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* authored by Huddleston and Pullum offers not only a list of adjectives that never license complementation<sup>74</sup> but also a distinction between optional complementation (“He was afraid of dogs./ Kim was very keen to take part./ He’s happy to leave it to you.”) and obligatory complementation (“They are mindful of the danger./ We were loath to accept their help./ They were fraught with danger.”) realised by prepositional phrases and infinitive clauses.<sup>75</sup> The adjective phrases “similar to mine” and “different than it used to be” also contain complements, the latter in the form of a comparative structure<sup>76</sup>, as do the following sentences, “I’m glad that you were able to come./ I’m not sure whether that will be possible./ I was amazed what a fuss he made./ She was busy marking assignments./ The offer is certainly worth considering.”, where we see subordinate clauses and *-ing* clauses playing the role of complement.<sup>77</sup>

In as far as modification is concerned, the question that springs to mind is why “I’m fonder of them than you are” is said to contain a complement whilst the relative clause in “He is now the **fattest he’s ever been**” is considered a **postmodifier**.<sup>78</sup> There appears to be some lack of consistency in Huddleston and Pullum’s analysis because, if the notion of indirect complementation was meant to

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>74</sup> Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 543.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 545.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 545-546.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 547.

account for the distinction, the comparative inflection that appears as a suffix in the head-adjective **fattest** should be said to license an indirect complement as well. Moreover, the following prepositional phrases are also viewed as postmodifiers: “happy **beyond belief**/ cautious **to excess**/ dangerous **in the extreme**/ *too long by a mile*/ *not very good at all*/ deaf **in both ears**/ young **at heart**/ very good **for a beginner**/ clear **in his mind**/ polite **in her manner**.<sup>79</sup> Since no explanation is offered for this preferred interpretation, one must wonder if the reason for it is that these prepositional phrases are not compulsory, or that some are fixed phrases or, yet, that they specify the degree... Although not stated, the most probable reason for the distinction is that here the prepositional phrases are not licensed by a head adjective that requires complementation, as is the case of the other prepositional phrases which are classified as complements.

As Huddleston and Pullum explain, there are relatively few adverb phrases that contain post-head dependents because “only adverbs with *-ly* suffixes license direct complements,<sup>80</sup>” and even postmodifiers are “excluded by a number of those that are not formed by *-ly* suffixation.<sup>81</sup>” In an adverb phrase, direct complements are mostly expressed by prepositional phrases and, less frequently, by comparative structures, as in “Fortunately for me, my mother was unusually liberal-minded./ Happily for the middle class, the workers hate pointy-headed intellectuals.<sup>82</sup>/ The duel solves disputes independently of abstract principles of justice./ There were some people who reacted differently than you did.<sup>83</sup>” Indirect complements are expressed by comparatives, infinitive clauses or subordinate clauses: “He didn’t read it *as carefully as he should have done*./ She works harder than he does./ He had read the paper *too hurriedly to be able to see its shortcomings*./ She spoke so softly that I couldn’t make out what she said.<sup>84</sup>” In what regards modification, relative clauses are considered postmodifiers, as in “She ran the fastest **she had ever run**.<sup>85</sup>”, and so are some prepositional phrases, for instance “Dan had behaved arrogantly **in the extreme**./ Later **in the day** the situation had improved slightly.<sup>86</sup>” Nevertheless, the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 550.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 571.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 570.

<sup>82</sup> Further proof that making the postmodifier-complement distinction is challenging comes from Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy’s *Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide to Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Whereas on page 455 the adverb phrase from “Unfortunately for me, I started to get ill.” is analysed as containing a head and a complement, on page 468 the one from “Luckily **for me**, there was another train just half an hour later.” is said to include a **postmodifier**.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 571.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 572.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 573.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 574.

absence of clear-cut explanations that reveal exactly why the relative clause in “the fastest **she had ever run**” is considered a postmodifier but “harder **than he does**” is said to contain an indirect complement and “differently **than you did**” a direct complement points to an imperative need for a solution to this terminological quandary.

Given that many adverbs are related to adjectives and that both these parts of speech display gradability, adjective and adverb phrases are strikingly similar in structure. Although it is especially adjectives that take complements, even in the case of adverb phrases instances of complementation may occur and need to be acknowledged. Postmodifiers and complements are two different types of dependents and the differences between them, albeit difficult to identify, cannot and should not be ignored. The easy way out would definitely be the use of terms like *pre-head* and **post-head** dependents of the head-adjective or head-adverb, in order to avoid the challenge of differentiating between postmodifiers and complements in the economy of adjective phrases and adverb phrases. Yet, for a description of phrase structure to be accurate in these two cases, a distinction needs to be made between postmodifiers and complements, but one that does not simply rely on positional terms or on degrees of compulsoriness. Given that both elements are placed after the head and that some complements are obligatory whilst others are not and since, although most postmodifiers are optional, their presence may sometimes be mandatory – semantically, at least, if not syntactically as well, a more straightforward analysis is noticeably required.

Relinquishing the need that the concept of indirect complementation be employed, my proposal operates solely with the notions of postmodification and complementation. I start from the idea that **enough** and **indeed** are clearly **postmodifiers**, being equivalent in function to the degree adverbs that precede the head-adjective or the head-adverb, effecting *premodification*. In a similar way, when it comes to discontinuous modification, just like the pre-head elements are analysed as *premodifiers*, the post-head elements should be viewed as **postmodifiers** of the head, not as complements, since they are licensed not by the head of the phrase but by the pre-head dependent itself: “When the adjective is graded, the complement is dependent not on the adjective directly, but on the grading element (-er, more, less, as, etc.), and is realised according to the type and structure of the grading element.<sup>87</sup>” Though an instance of complementation in such structures can, indeed, be singled out, these post-head elements can only be said to complement their pre-head counterpart, whilst in the economy of the entire adjective phrase or adverb phrase they are clearly the rearmost constituents of a single discontinuous modifier: “She was *more* thoughtful **than I had expected**./ She acted *more* thoughtfully **than I had expected**.” In the following example, it is the head adjective that licenses the

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<sup>87</sup> Angela Downing and Philip Locke, *English Grammar. A University Course* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 500.



prepositional phrase, but it is the grading element attached to the head adjective that requires the presence of the **comparative clause**, therefore only the former is a complement, the latter being a **postmodifier** in the economy of the adjective phrase: “I’m fonder of them **than you are**.” Correspondingly, in “I am fond **enough of them to make this sacrifice**.” the prepositional phrase complements the head, whilst the infinitive clause complements the postmodifier **enough**, so in the structure of our adjective phrase **enough ... to make this sacrifice** is a **postmodifier**, this being another case of discontinuous modification, like the ones discussed at length above. *So, too, more*, the comparative with *as...as*, the comparative suffix *-er* and the superlative one *-est* “have the same function of specifying degree as the various premodifiers.”<sup>88</sup> Consequently, both **comparatives** and **superlatives** will be analysed in this way, so relative clauses are seen as **postmodifiers of the head**: whereas the adverb phrase in the sentence “She ran the **fastest she had ever run**.” contains a relative clause as postmodifier, its presence being licensed not by the head, but by the grading element attached to the head adverb, the sentence “The boys easiest to teach were in my class.” features an infinitive clause as complement.

More often than not, infinitive clauses are complements (“My son was anxious to be a director./ We were glad to have come and everyone was sorry to see us leave.”), but they can function as postmodifiers (“My son was young **to be a director**./ It was warm **to be wearing an overcoat**.”) when used to specify the degree, in informal, elliptical structures originating from their formal equivalent containing discontinuous modification: “My son was *too* young **to be a director**./ It was *too* warm **to be wearing an overcoat**.”

Nominal clauses are also used as complements (“They were delighted that we came./ I am afraid that the Yorkshire pudding has collapsed.”), but can be postmodifiers (“Ed is so tall **that he can see over the wall**./ Jane sang so magnificently **that everyone in the audience was smitten**.”) when included in instances of discontinuous modification. In the example “Mom was so happy that we came **that she immediately gave us all a warmhearted group hug**.” the first nominal clause is a complement licensed by the head adjective but the second nominal clause is a **postmodifier**, its presence being required not by the head of the phrase but by the *premodifier*.

Although comparative structures are generally postmodifiers, featuring in discontinuous modification, when following words like “different” or “differently” they are complements, being licensed by the head of the phrase: “He is now different than he used to be./ I reacted differently than you did.”

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<sup>88</sup> Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy’s *Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide to Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 441.

While *-ing* clauses always function as complements (“Although his proposal was worth considering, it went unnoticed, as we were all busy drawing sketches.”), prepositional phrases can be used either for complementation (“He was ashamed of his behaviour./ My wife is brilliant at physics./ She often reacts differently from everyone else./ Luckily for me, nobody noticed my grin./ Purchase of State vehicles is handled similarly to all State purchases.”) or for postmodification in cases where a mere specification of scope or degree is made (“They behaved badly **in the extreme**./ My wife is brilliant **in many respects**./ She reacted *really* well **for her age**.”) or when they are part of discontinuous modification (“It was the *most* famous **of all her songs**./ She was the *most* beautiful woman **in the whole world**.”)

This model of analysis is more explicit than the extremely sketchy postmodifier-only approach, more rigorous than the highly reductive complement-only approach, and more systematic than both, as it does not gratuitously mix complementation and postmodification by deeming the former a sub-class of the latter or the other way around. It simply states that in adjective and adverb phrases there may be instances of discontinuous modification, in which case some dependents appear before the head, being *premodifiers*, and the rest after the head, being **postmodifiers**. These postmodifiers are required by their pre-head counterpart, a degree adverb, or by a comparative inflection attached to the head. Likewise, since postmodifiers are said to be “concerned with the specification of degree” whilst complements correspond semantically “to an argument of the adjectival semantic predicate,”<sup>89</sup> prepositional phrases, infinitive clauses and comparative structures will be judged according to these criteria, and analysed either as complements, when they are syntactically and semantically licensed by the head, or as **postmodifiers**, when all they do is grade, intensify or soften the adjective or adverb they modify. Thus, it is not only the level of obligatoriness and the position occupied that enforce the distinction between postmodifiers and complements. The adjective-head or the adverb-head are the ones that can license complements in the form of prepositional phrases by dictating and limiting the choice of preposition. Prepositional phrases that merely intensify, limit the intensity or show the degree are postmodifiers. Similarly, the infinitive clauses that specify a degree are postmodifiers, while all the others are complements.

To conclude, in the structure of adjective and adverb phrases the post-head dependents are analysed as follows: whereas *-ing* clauses are always complements, prepositional phrases and infinitive clauses can play the role of either postmodifiers or complements, and the same is true for comparative

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<sup>89</sup> Rodney Huddleston, *Introduction to the Grammar of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 310.

structures and subordinate clauses – comparative structures are normally postmodifiers, with the few exceptions when they are not part of discontinuous modification, being licensed by the head of the phrase; relative clauses are always postmodifiers and nominal clauses are usually complements, except when they are part of discontinuous modification.