The Adjectival Phrase

An adjectival phrase has the same structure as a nominal phrase (Premodifier – Headword – Postmodifier). Headword is represented by an adjective or an adjectival participle.

- simple adjectival phrase: *(The title of this book seems) catchy.*
- complex adjectival phrase, with PreM or PostM: *(His jokes are) very good.*

The Adjective and its characteristics

Modern English adjectives have only one form and do not agree with their noun in number and gender. Comparison is the only grammatical category. According to their morphemic structure adjectives fall into four main classes:

1. simple (base adjectives)
   a. *big, black, exact, good, nice* - none have more than two syllables, no derivational morphemes
   b. comparison: *long – longer – longest* – may take inflection –er and –est; *bad – worse – worst* - undergo some morphophonemic changes in suppletion
   c. serve as bases for nouns *goodness*, adverbs *nicely*, verbs *blacken*

2. derived adjectives
   a. *boyish (noun), confident (verb), untrue (other adjectives)* - formed by the addition of derivational morphemes to the base
   b. usually form the comparative and superlative degree with more and the most

3. Participial adjectives
   a. present and past participles which have become completely adjectival – this can be seen in the change of meaning. They are completely devoid of the idea of action
   b. amusing, charming, interesting – present participles which have come to be used as adjectives
   c. fixed, distinguished – past participles which have become purely adjectival in meaning
   d. if meaning permits, adjectives may:
      i. a very amusing book – be premodified by adverbs of degree (very, rather, most, quite)
      ii. surprising, more surprising, most surprising – have comparative and superlative forms
      iii. strikingly handsome man – have adverbs derived from them
   e. some of them my have only one written form but two spoken forms
      i. *She went to London to see her aged parents* (premodifier)
      ii. *You have aged.* (passive voice)
      iii. *Our children start going to school when they are aged seven.* (passive voice)

4. Compound adjectives
a. *good-looking, new-born* – formed with present or past participles as second element

b. *far-sighted, kind-hearted* – with *-ed* added to nouns occurring as the second element of a compound

**Comparison**

- *Richard is brighter than his brothers*: comparative – item is compared or contrasted with another item
- *Richard is brightest of them all*: superlative – the item compared is regarded as supreme within a larger group

- Two degrees of comparison: comparative and superlative, base adjective is referred to as the positive degree
- *bright, brighter* – the degree of quality expressed by the adjective is denoted by the inflections *-er* and *-est*
- *more useful, most useful* - where comparison with the means of inflections is not possible, more or most + adjective is used

**Inflectional comparison** (qualitative adjectives) by means of the inflection *-er* and *-est*:

1. *short* – *shorter* – *shortest*; most monosyllabic adjectives
2. *polite* – *politer* – *politest*; most disyllabic adjectives with the stress on the second syllable
3. *happy* – *happier* – *happiest*; most disyllabic adjectives stressed on the first syllable and ending in *-y, -ow, -er, -some, -el, -le* preceded by a consonant (*funny, hollow, lonesome, cruel, gentle*)
4. *unhappy* – *unhappier* – *unhappiest*; above mentioned types derived with means of negative prefixes
5. *kind-hearted* – *kinder-hearted* – *kindest-hearted*; *blood-thirsty* – *blood-thirstier*; compound adjectives whose first or second element is usually compared by means of *-er, -est* unless the component elements form a very close semantic unit

**Spelling and pronunciation**

- *big – bigger – biggest*; doubling of consonant before inflections with monosyllabic adjectives ending in a single consonant preceded by a short vowel
- *wise – wiser – wisest*; dropping of mute *-e*
- *dry – drier – driest*; adjectives ending in *-y* preceded by a consonant change *-y* into *-i* before inflections
- *near – nearer – nearest*; *r* is not pronounced in the positive form
- *simple – simpler – simplest*; a syllabic *l* becomes non-syllabic before inflections
- *cruel – crueler – cruellest*; a final *-l* is always doubled in British English
- *long – longer – longest*; phoneme *[g]* is added after *[ŋ]*

**Comparison by Means of the Premodifiers More and Most**
1. active, awkward, comic; all other than those enumerated above including participial adjectives, whether of one or more syllables
   lcunning – cunniger – cunningest; wicked – wickeder – wickedest
2. ill, like, right, wrong, real; adjectives which normally do not incline to comparison
3. abrupt, correct; adjectives stressed on the final syllable and ending in two plosives
4. alive, alone, content; adjectives used only predicatively

Frequently found in:

- you never found a house more neat and clean; adjectives used as postmodifiers for more emphasis
- the new version of the Opel is larger, longer and more roomy; adjectives in predicative final position
- she is more proud than vain; two qualities of the same person are compared
- He is more healthy (vs. healthier) than his brother; when there is a focus on degree of comparison, more and most can take the stress and can be therefore used with every adjective
- He is more scholar than teacher; when two nouns are compared

Irregular comparison – some adjectives and adverbs have comparative and superlative forms which differ from the base either phonetically, to some extent semantically, with suppletive forms or are irregular in some other way.

1. Group A: adjectives with double form of comparison:
   a. old – older; elder – eldest
   b. late – later; latter – latest; last
   c. near – nearer – nearest; next
   d. far – farther; further – farthest; furthest
2. Group B comprises adjectives and adverbs:
   a. good; well – better – best
   b. bad; evil; ill – worse – worst
   c. little; smaller; less – smallest; least
3. Group C includes adjectives which have their superlative in –most added to the form of the original:
   a. inner – innermost
   b. utter – utmost; uttermost
   c. eastern – easternmost
   d. further – furthermost
4. defective comparisons of Latin origin which exist in English only in their comparative degree:
   junior to, senior to, superior to, inferior to, anterior to, posterior to

Adjectives Incapable of Comparison – we distinguish comparables and non-comparables

Non-comparables are the classifying or relative adjectives adjectives like wooden, golden, industrial, musical, urban; adjectives denoting materials, or the ones used in figurative sense (golden age)
Some groups of qualitative adjectives cannot be compared on account of their meaning:

- *empty, extreme, final, full* – highest degree of quality has been reached
- *dead, deaf, lame, mute* – qualities do not allow comparison
- *deader than a doornail*

**Comparative structures** – involve both adjectives and adverbs in order to compare:

- *(un-)* equal terms
  - Comparison of Equality
    
    *Peter is as tall as his father.*
    
    *(As) drunk as a lord.* – with *be*, first as can be dropped.
    
    - *Our flat is [like, similar to, the same as] Fred’s flat.* – equal degree of quality is expressed by adjectives *like, similar or the same*
  - Comparison of Inequality
    
    *Peter is not so/as strong as his father.*
    
    *The brand of coffee is not quite so good as the one we had last week.*
    
    *Peter is not nearly so intelligent as his brother.*
- terms one of which is superior or inferior to the other
  - Comparison of Superiority
    
    *A plane is faster than a train.* – comparative form
    
    *Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in Great Britain.* – superlative form
  - Comparison of Inferiority
    
    *You are less hardworking than you used to be.* – comparative form
    
    *His early dramas are the least known.* – superlative form
- absolute comparison – used when there is no direct comparison at all
  - *the lower/upper lip* – to express contrast
  - *this is most/very/exceedingly interesting* – absolute superlative; most indicates a very high degree
  - *the days are getting colder and colder* – a gradual increase or decrease expressed by two comparatives joined by *and*

**Syntactical functions of adjectives**

In phrase structure adjectives are used:

- *This is an interesting article.* – attributively – as premodifiers to nominal headwords
- *This article is interesting.* – predicatively – as headwords in adjectival phrases
- *secretary general, something interesting.* – as postmodifiers to nominal headwords
- *red hot, icy cold* – as premodifiers to adjectival headwords
• *in general, in short* – as object to preposition

**Adjectives Used Only Attributively**

1. earthen, oaten, wheaten, wooden – adjectives derived from material nouns by the derivational morpheme –en (may be used in figurative sense e.g. a waxon face)
2. adjectives derived from nouns by the suffix –ly
   fatherly care, sisterly concern – animate noun + ly has the meaning “characteristic of”
   hourly, daily – occurring every period of time denoted by the given noun (may be used as adverbs)
3. average, former, inner, upper – miscellaneous adjectives

**Adjectives Used Only Predicatively**

1. afraid, alike – adjectives with the prefix a-; normally denote a non-permanent activity or state
   (Are you aware of the consequences)
   a child who is asleep = a child asleep – as these adjectives are transformations from relative clauses, they can also occur as postmodifiers in nominal phrases
   boy that is afraid = frightened boy – when used predicatively, we use synonyms
2. The ship is bound for America; His success due to hard work – adjectives whose meaning are incomplete by themselves and need a postmodifier (bound, due, exempt, proof, worth)
3. *I’m glad to see you again; He was sorry to see them go; The child is well again; He was very ill* – adjectives glad and sorry in reference to animate nouns

**Adjectives as Headwords in Nominal Phrases (Conversion of Adjectives into Nouns – Substantivization)*** – have acquired all the characteristics of nouns, function as a noun

- American, Russian – substantivized adjectives in –an and –on denoting nationality
- a Christian, a Catholic – names of political parties and religions
- a black, a criminal – individual substantivized adjectives
- the reds and golds of autumn – colour adjectives particularly when they denote shades of colours

**Adjectives only Partly Converted** – take the definite article, but are not inflected for the plural or for the possessive case

- the poor = poor people in general
- the very poor, the selfish rich – partly converted adjectives can be converted by the same intensifiers and other adverbs as adjectives and even adjectives
- the bad, the blind, the deaf – qualitative adjectives converted into nouns have plural meaning and agree with a plural verb, they do not take the plural inflection
- the captured, the defeated, the invited, the underprivileged – some participles (if we want to denote a single person we must add a noun, e.g. a brave man, a rich woman)
- the English, the Irish, the Scotch – a few adjectives denoting nations
Do you like English (=angleščino)
Do you like the English (=angleže)

- Slovene, English – the names of the languages are used with a singular verb only, but are not preceded by the definite article
- the absurd, the best, the inevitable – partly converted adjectives denoting abstract notions, singular structure, preceded by the definite article

Partly converted adjectives with a singular meaning may be used in some prepositional phrases: *for good, for the present*

**The Pro-Word One** – in some structures English adjectives cannot stand alone. In order not to repeat for stylistic reasons, a previously mentioned noun is replaced by the pro-word / substitute word one or its plural form ones. It is also one way of substantivizing of adjective in colloquial style. *Have you got any rubbers – I need a soft one.*

- *He prefers strong beer to mild (*one*)* – pro-word one replaces countable nouns only
- Adjective also stands alone when:
  - *In pursuing his aim he uses fair means and foul.* – when it contrasts with other adjective
  - *He has written a number of articles, informative and interesting.* – in post-modification structures
- pro-word one may or may not be used after adjectives in the comparative degree and is felt unnecessary in superlative degree.
  *Which of four brothers are you? The younger (one)? The youngest of the four brothers is also the nicest.*
  *This knife will not do. I need a sharper one.* – when preceded by an indefinite article, one is felt indispensable
- *Here are my new records. Which (one) do you want to hear? Which of these photos do you prefer, this (one) or that (one)?* Optional use of one after interrogatives and demonstratives.
- *a glass bottle or a plastic one* – pro word one can occasionally be used after nouns functioning as premodifier in nominal phrases

**Premodifiers in Adjectival Phrases**
- intensifiers or adverbs of degree *Paul’s wife is extremely attractive.*
- qualitative adverbs *The living room was beautifully warm.*
- adjectives and participles *His eyes are dark brown; My clothes were soaking wet*
- nouns *life-long*
Postmodifiers in Adjectival Phrases

- the adverb enough *Are you warm enough*
- prepositional phrases *We are curious about their goings-on.*
- infinitives and infinitival clauses *I was happy to hear of your success. John is eager to please.*
- that clauses *I am confident that you will succeed.*
- dependent questions *We are curious what decision he will take.*