

## *Original Paper*

# A New Approach of Grammar Teaching: Pre-modifiers in Noun Phrases

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### ***Abstract***

*Teaching grammar has always constituted a major part of language education in curricula around the world. This paper investigates pre-modifiers in noun phrase in English and focuses on their definition and classifications. Previous scholars have different focuses and give various definitions and classifications of pre-modifiers. Through thoroughly evaluating and comparing of the different theories given by previous grammarians and linguists, this study redefines modifiers from a semantic, formal and syntactical perspective and constructs a new classification based on word classes and classifies pre-modifiers into six categories: 1). adjectival pre-modifiers; 2). nominal pre-modifiers; 3). participle pre-modifiers; 4). genitive pre-modifiers; 5). adverb phrases pre-modifiers; 6). sentences, etc. The implications of this paper may provide new insights in grammar teaching in English classes.*

### ***Keywords***

*noun phrases, pre-modifiers, classification, grammar teaching*

### **1 Introduction**

Teaching grammar has always constituted a major part of language education in curricula around the world (Liu, Sands-Meyer, & Audran, 2019). Numerous second language acquisition (SLA) researchers and teachers in practice have tried to decrease the difficulty of grasping grammar for learners in second and foreign language acquisition (Abdulmajeed & Hameed, 2017; Graus & Coppin, 2015; Kachru, 2010; Larsen-Freeman, 2003a; 2003b). One of the most debatable attempts is to form a better understanding of definitions and classifications of grammatical structures, so as the instruction may be more effective (Nan, 2015; Zhang, 2009; Rutherford, 2014). As an important element of noun phrases, modifiers, especially pre-modifiers, have drawn the attention of many grammarians. Some of them (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Quirk et al., 1985) describe a general picture, while others only focus on the meaning and practical usage (Zhang, 1999; Kolln, 1996). Downing and Locke (2002, p. 445) do not

mention the concept of “modifier”, they define it through the explanation of “intrinsic features of things”. Words that describe inherent, permanent qualities or indicate a subclass of an entity work as “pre-modifiers”. Their definition focuses only on semantic features but ignore the form and syntax. Based on different definitions, researchers in this field classify pre-modifiers in different ways. Huddleston and Pullum (2008, p. 95) focus on the relationship between different elements within the noun phrases and divide modifiers into external and internal modifiers, which can be further divided into pre-head modifiers and post-head modifiers. It is a clear way to divide modifiers according to locations, but the division of internal and external modifiers arouses serious concern since they regard the corresponding location to determiner as the dividing criteria. It is very problematic. Downing and Locke (2002) adopt a semantic point of view and classify pre-modifiers into epithets and classifiers according to the context and environment. Sometimes it helps learners to have a better understanding; but division only from a semantic point of view seems unreliable. Downing and Locke did not give a clear way to differentiate epithets and classifiers when they are used together. Carter and McCarthy (2006) adopt a more constructional point of view since they classify modifiers from word class perspective. Carter and McCarthy’s definition is clear and easy to understand, yet not complete enough. In order to facilitate grammar learning, learners need a clear and complete structure. Given the drawbacks in the current definitions and classifications, this study was trying to first redefine pre-modifiers in noun phrases, and then give a new classification of pre-modifiers which is clearer and more comprehensive after analyzing classifications of previous scholars. In real educational practice, grammar teaching has always been a difficult part for both teachers and learners. Students are likely to feel unencouraged by the learning process of English grammar (Zhang, 2009; Graus & Coppen, 2015; Nan, 2015; Rutherford, 2014). Teachers need to help students to form a better understanding of the definitions and classifications of certain grammar structures, especially noun phrases. This current paper focused on the specific details and rationales on the definitions and classifications of noun phrases. The results will thus provide insights and a new approach to grammar teaching in English language classes.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Definition*

#### 2.1.1 Definition of Modifiers

It is interesting that in earlier grammars, the term “modifier” referred only to words, phrases or clauses which modified verbs, adjectives, or other adverbials, but not to those which modified nouns (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1237). With the development of language, nowadays the modification of noun phrases takes prominent part in the study of modification. In modern grammar, noun phrases mainly contain three constituent parts, the head, the determinative and the modification (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1238). Before answering the question what a pre-modifier is, it is important to clarify what is a modifier. Modifier is “A word or group of words which gives further information about (‘modifies’) another

word or group of words (the HEAD)” (LDLTAL, 2005, p. 436. s.v. *modifier*). This is a rather general definition of modifiers which apply not only to modifiers of noun phrases but also to that of verb phrases, adjectival phrases and adverbial phrases, etc. Similarly, Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 322) define modifier as “modifiers indicate qualities and attributes of the noun head”. It may describe size, color, material, location in space and time, etc. For instance:

- [1] *those big boxes in the garage*
- [2] *a little red lever which controls the temperature*

Zhang (1999, p. 675) proposes that modification is a method of expressing meanings; by using various kinds of modification, we can make sentences express vivid, impressive and complex ideas, for example:

- [1] *some intelligent students*
- [2] *some intelligent college students*
- [3] *some very intelligent medical college students*

Zhang’s definition focuses on the meaning perspective. Kolln (1996) gives a similar definition pointing out that modification refers to change. Modifiers are used to modify a word or other structure in the sentence and change its meaning. These two definitions only cover part of the function of a modifier and miss the grammar part of function.

#### 2.1.2 Definition of Pre-modifier

Modifiers before the head are called pre-modifiers, for example, *expensive in this expensive camera*. Modifiers after the head are called post-modifiers, for example with a stumpy tail in the cat with a stumpy tail (LDLTAL, 2005, s.v. *modifier*). Since the focus of this paper is pre-modifier, the notion of post-modifier will not be discussed. Generally, most grammarians divide modifiers into pre- and post-ones according to their position, while Halliday holds a different opinion. Halliday (1985, pp. 165-166) restricts the term “modifier” to pre-modifiers and calls post-modifiers qualifiers which cover the whole part after the head noun. Although it is a problem of terminology, pre- and post- are clearer in naming different modifiers since they can illustrate the position differences.

As for pre-modifiers, Quirk et al. (1985, p. 1321) define that pre-modifiers which co-occur with the head of a noun phrase are lexical and grammatical items of a wide range and indefinite complexity and interrelationship. They can precede a noun head to form a noun phrase. He also proposes that the pre-modification comprises all the items placed before the head word other than determinatives, notably adjectives (or, rather, adjective phrases) and nouns:

- [1] *some furniture*
- [2] *some expensive furniture*
- [3] *some very expensive furniture*
- [4] *some very expensive office furniture*
- [5] *some very very expensive office furniture*

Ruan (1991, pp. 19-20) defines pre-modifier as “the attribute which precede and modify the noun

head”. He claims that all kinds of word or phrases could function as a pre-modifier. Obviously, this is not possible. Downing and Locke (2002, p. 449) have a different point of view when defining pre-modifier. They find that in the surrounding context there are some words which can describe the inherent, more permanent qualities of the entity itself. Some of these words describe objective qualities (e.g., *narrow*), while others are subjective and represent the personal attitude of the writer (e.g., *stinking*); others do not describe the entity qualitatively, but indicate a particular subclass of the referent (e.g., *human life as distinct from animal, organic, social, family life*). Downing and Locke (2002, p. 450) did not use the word “modifier”, but explain it by using the definition of “intrinsic features of things”. The items that describe subjective and objective qualities of an entity are considered as two types of epithet. The item which indicates a subclass of the entity will be called the classifier. Both the epithet and the classifier refer to semantic features which are permanent and intrinsic in the referent “thing” named by the head noun, which contrast with most of the temporary and extrinsic features of the entity. Downing & Locke focus on the semantic features of things. However, the introduction of the new words “epithet” and “classifier” makes their definition more complex and confusing.

## 2.2 Classification

This part mainly reviews three kinds of classifications of pre-modifiers, given by Huddleston & Pullum (2008, pp. 84-97), Downing and Locke (2002, pp. 450-456) and Carter and McCarthy (2006). Standing on different positions, they classify pre-modifiers in various ways. However, they all have some problems in their theory which will be discussed one by one in the following paragraphs.

### 2.2.1 Huddleston and Pullum

Huddleston and Pullum (2008, p. 95) focus on the relationship between different elements within the noun phrases and divide modifiers into two categories: internal modifiers and external modifiers. They give a clear structure of the sub classification of pre-head internal modifiers (2008, p. 96). Basically, there are four types of words functioning as pre-head modifiers. They are illustrated as follows:

- [1] Adjective Phrase: *a long letter, this latest problem, some very irate customers*
- [2] Verb Phrase: *the condemned man, a sleeping child, a recently discovered fossil*
- [3] Nominal: *a brick wall, a United States warship, high octane petrol*
- [4] Determinatives Phrase: *another two boys, the more than thirty candidates*

The adjective is the most common type of pre-head modifier which can be used alone or with its own dependents. There are mainly have two types of verb phrase pre-head modifiers, a gerund-participle or a past participle form of the verb. The pre-head modifiers can be nominals consisting of nouns, either alone or with their own internal dependents. For instance, in *a United States warship* the pre-head modifier is *United States* which cannot contain its own determiner because it is a nominal, not a noun phrase. The phrase *\* a the United States warship* is grammatically unacceptable. The external modifiers are located within the NP but outside the head nominal like internal modifiers (Huddleston & Pullum, 2008, p. 97). There are various subtypes of external modifiers, all highly restricted with respect to the range of expressions admitted. Here we illustrate just three of these subtypes:

[1] *all the children, both her sons, half a day, twice the amount we'd asked for*

[2] *such a disaster, too risky a venture, so difficult an assignment*

[3] *even the children, only a politician*

Huddleston and Pullum argue that “*all*” and “*both*” in the phrase “*all the children*” and “*both her sons*” are external modifiers. They do not distinguish the determinatives and modifiers clearly. It causes confusion because the definitions and functions of determinatives and modifiers overlap with each other.

Huddleston and Pullum (2008) only focus on the relationship between different elements within the noun phrases. It is very problematic because they regard the corresponding location to determiner as the dividing criteria.

First, when Huddleston and Pullum classify the internal modifiers into adjective phrases, verb phrases, nominal phrase and determinatives phrases, they state that alone or with dependents determinatives are pre-head modifiers when they follow a determiner rather than functioning as one themselves. The problem is if we define it in this way, it will be difficult to distinguish determiners and modifiers which both are important elements of a noun phrase.

Moreover, the same conflict appears in Huddleston and Pullum’s theory of external modifiers. They give several examples:

[1] *all the children, both her sons, half a day, twice the amount we'd asked for*

[2] *such a disaster, too risky a venture, so difficult an assignment*

[3] *even the children, only a politician*

Huddleston and Pullum argue that “*all*” and “*both*” in the phrase “*all the children*” and “*both her sons*” are external modifiers. However, in their book Huddleston and Pullum (2008, p. 93) point that they are also determinative phrases which are determinatives with dependents functions as the head of a phrase. It causes confusion because the definitions and functions of determinatives and modifiers overlap with each other.

Furthermore, there seems no need to divide modifiers into internal and external ones. Huddleston and Pullum take “*another two boys*” as an example of internal modifier, while they also take “*half a day*” as an example of external modifier. There is no necessarily difference between these two phrases. Besides, Huddleston and Pullum (2008, p. 84) raise a concept of internal and external dependent. Internal dependent is what falls inside the head nominal. For example, in the phrase “*a big dog*”, “*big*” here is an internal dependent. Obviously, this concept overlaps with that of internal modifiers. The same overlapping problem appears in the concept of external dependent and external modifier. The concept of internal/external dependent or modifier is unnecessary.

### 2.2.2 Downing and Locke

Compared to Huddleston and Pullum, Downing and Locke (2002, p. 450) describe a quite different structure of modifier. They point out that “things” have intrinsic features or extrinsic features. As mentioned in the definition part, “intrinsic features” working as modifiers have two sub categories: the

epithet and the classifier. The epithet element is realized typically by adjective phrases in which very often only the adjectival head is expounded. Generally, there are five types of epithets:

**Table 1. Five Types of Epithets (Downing & Locke, 2002)**

Types of epithets	Examples
Objective	a <i>popular</i> disco, a <i>sunny</i> day
Subjective	a <i>princely</i> meal, a <i>vile</i> crime
Objective/Subjective	<i>absolute</i> zero, <i>absolute</i> rubbish
Non-inherent	a <i>good</i> lecturer, a <i>poor</i> speaker
Impressionistic	a <i>shabby</i> overcoat, a <i>taciturn</i> person

It is easy to understand that adjectival epithets can express objective or subjective qualities of an entity. For example, according to Downing & Locke, the word “*small*” in the sentence “*I bought a small bottle*”. refers to a quality that could be experienced by everyone. So here “small” here is an objective epithet. In contrast, subjective epithets express the speaker’s or writer’s subjective experience or attitude to the referent of the head noun. There are two broad kinds of attitude, appreciative such as *wonderful*, *heavenly*, *huge* and *rapturous*; pejorative like *appalling*, *ghastly*, *idiotic* and *monstrous*. The third category of epithets is word that has both types of reference. Many attributes can be used subjectively or objectively by the same adjective, for instance:

Objective: *a provincial city; pure wool; a mediaeval castle; a sheer cliff*

Subjective: *a provincial attitude; pure chance; a mediaeval state of sanitation; a sheer nonsense*

However, confusions are caused when the epithets are sub-classified this way. It is almost impossible to strictly distinguish the subjective and objective epithets since different people may have rather different opinion in defining subjective and objective.

Non-inherent reference of epithet refers to inherent characteristics of an entity. Although most epithets express intrinsic, inherent characteristics of an entity, sometimes they are used to refer not to the thing itself but to an entity or to the manner of performing and action associated with the entity. This type of reference is called non-inherent (Downing & Locke, 2002, p. 452). For example, a *light eater* refers to a person who eats light food or does not eat much.

The last category is the impressionistic reference of the epithet. Downing and Locke (2002, p. 452) state that there are numerous attributes which are objectively inherent in the entity, but to which a writer or speaker may attach a certain emotion or descriptive value. They name it “impressionistic epithet” which implies that it is not the adjective itself, but the way it is experienced by the writer, that determines the contextual meaning. For example, “ugly villages” in a context describes the tramway in D. H. Lawrence’s *England, my England*. Impressionistic epithets are commonly used in literature works and spoken discourses. It is of key importance when the writer or speaker tries to express

emotion or descriptive value. However, the way of classifying epithets into these five categories is confusing since the criteria of classification is not clear, self-contradictory and overlapped with each other.

According to Downing and Locke (2002, p. 453), pre-modifier are divided into two parts, one is epithet which has been discussed above, and the other one is classifier.

The classifier element restricts the class of entity named by the head noun to a subclass (Downing & Locke, 2002, p. 453). There are mainly three general categories of classifier, classification by nouns, classification by adjectives and participles and classification by other classes of units.

Adjectives and participles are the most common classifiers. Downing and Locke (2002, p. 454) sub-classifies this type of classifiers into more than ten categories according to the different domains of references.

**Table 2. Ten Type of Classifiers (Downing & Locke, 2002)**

<b>Different domains</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>places</b>	<i>African politics</i>
<b>periods</b>	<i>prehistoric remains</i>
<b>styles</b>	<i>classical music</i>
<b>institutions</b>	<i>municipal authorities</i>
<b>professions</b>	<i>medical student</i>
<b>processes</b>	<i>coming events, leading article, fallen leaves</i>
<b>science</b>	<i>atomic energy</i>
<b>scales</b>	<i>main road</i>
<b>activities</b>	<i>social worker</i>
<b>qualities</b>	<i>heavy water</i>

Categorizing and sub-classifying is supposed to make knowledge easier to understand and use. However, Downing and Locke make it difficult to form an overall layout by classifying them with flexible and unreliable criteria. Downing and Locke also distinguish the function of *-ing* classifiers, for example, *coming* in *coming events*, from that in *boxing* or *cycling*, which is classified as participial peripheral adjectives.

Downing and Locke find that a word can have more than one function which often overlaps with each other. They argue that the differences between the experiential functions of determination, description and classification are not absolute. Many words can have more than one function. The following are examples of words which can expound both the epithet and classifier elements:

**Table 3. Examples with both Epithet and Classifier Elements**

epithet	classifier
the <i>cutting</i> remark	the <i>cutting</i> instrument
a <i>blind</i> person	<i>blind</i> flying
an iron will	an iron bridge
a <i>fast</i> train (=goes fast)	a <i>fast</i> train (=classified as “express”)

Similar with the problem of an epithet could be either subjective or objective, pre-modifier could also be an epithet and a classifier. This dual function easily causes confusion to the classification of pre-modifiers.

There are many problems of Downing and Locke’s classification of epithet and classifiers. Downing and Locke (2002) adopt a semantic point of view to classify pre-modifiers into epithets and classifiers only according to the meaning, context and environment. It is not a reliable clarification since semantic feature is too flexible to work as the criteria of a structural classification. What if epithets and classifiers appear together, how can learners distinguish them from each other?

Downing and Locke classify epithet into five types: objective, subjective, either objective or subjective, non-inherent and impressionistic epithets. The problem is that the criteria of classification are very confusing. Take “pure wool” and “pure chance” as an example. “Pure” has several meanings (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2003, p. 1010. s.v. *pure*). One is “unmixed with any other matter”, which suites the explanation of “*pure*” in “*pure wool*”. Another meaning is “being thus and no other”, which explain the word “*pure*” in “*pure chance*”. Downing & Locke point out that “*pure*” here has two functions when working as epithet: objective “*pure*” in “*pure wool*” and subjective “*pure*” in “*pure chance*”. However, confusions are caused when the epithets are sub-classified this way. As it is mentioned before, the example of “*a small bottle*” is used to illustrate the objective type of epithets. In determining what size is small, different individuals have different scales or criteria. The size of “small” could be agreed by everyone, and it could also be a subjective attribute which is determined by the speaker’s or writer’s own experience. As a matter of fact, this type of epithets could be considered as exceptions of the first two categories. The disadvantage of this classification by Downing and Locke is that there are too many exceptions which will easily cause confusion to learners of their book.

Moreover, as for the category of non-inherent reference of the epithet, for example, Downing and Locke use “*a beautiful singer*” here to illustrate sometimes the reference may be ambiguous with a non-inherent type of epithet. However, the same phrase “*a beautiful singer*” can also be used as the example of subjective type of epithet to express the speaker or writer’s attitudes or experiences. Downing and Locke’s theory is self-contradictory and overlapped with each other when comes to the non-inherent type of epithets. Though the impressionistic type of epithet may learners in their English outputting, especially in writing, the way of classifying epithets into these five categories is confusing



since the criteria of classification is not clear, self-contradictory and overlapped with each other. Another problem in Downing and Locke's theory is that some pre-modifier can be both the epithet and classifier. Take "the cutting remark" and "the cutting instrument" as an example. "Cutting" in "the cutting remark" is an epithet giving further information of the remark which means the speaker or writer is tending to hurt the others' feelings. In contrast, in "the cutting instrument" the word "cutting" is a classifier which defines the function of the instrument. The dual function of the same word which often causes confusions and ambiguities reveals that the classification of this theory is not exhaustive and clear enough. Although Downing and Locke try to make their way of classification flawless by stating that "all the pre-head elements of a NG contribute to the identification of the head in different ways. The determiner is mainly selective, the epithet qualitative and often gradable, while the classifier is taxonomic" (Downing & Locke, 2002, p. 456), the disadvantages cannot be ameliorated. It is good that they focus on the function, contextual situation and essential meanings inside the words, but the division of the epithets and classifiers are rather obscure and vague, even within their own sub-categories. Besides, the exceptions are so many that influence the unity of the whole structures.

### 2.2.3 Carter and McCarthy

Similar to Huddleston and Pullum, Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 324) divide modifiers into pre-modifiers and post-modifiers according to their location. But the difference is that in Carter & McCarthy's book there is no division of internal modifiers and external modifiers. Carter and McCarthy point that there are mainly two types of pre-modifiers which are illustrated as follows:

**Table 4. Two Types of Pre-modifiers (Carter & McCarthy, 2006)**

Adjective phrases	<i>a <u>different</u> bus</i>
	<i>a <u>very important</u> meeting</i>
	<i>a <u>cheap</u> book</i>
Noun phrases	<i>a <u>stone</u> wall</i>
	<i>a <u>first-year undergraduate</u> seminar</i>
	<i><u>media</u> hype</i>

Carter and McCarthy classify the pre-modifiers from a grammar perspective. They think that word class is the criteria for classifying modifiers. This is what many grammarians adopted. It is much easier to classify modifiers from word class point of view. However, Carter and McCarthy missed a very important category, the participle pre-modifiers. Besides, genitive and adverbial phrase can also work as pre-modifiers.

Many other scholars hold similar opinions. They point out that participle phrases can also function as pre-modifiers (e.g., Quirk et al., 1985). The participle pre-modifiers are commonly divided into two categories: gerund participle and past participle ones. According to Quirk et al. (1985), whether a

participle can be a pre-modifier depends on whether it has a function that expresses permanent attributes; especially, whether a past participle can work as a pre-modifier depends on its validity of expressing information. Some Chinese scholars also have done some researches on pre-modifiers. Yi (1986) argues that the position of participle pre-modifiers is determined by syntactic, semantic and pragmatic reasons. He agrees with Quirk et al. (1985) on the point that past participle could be a pre-modifier if it expresses permanent attributes. In addition, he also believes that a past participle with complex semantics can function as a pre-modifier. Cheng (2002) notices that the head of a noun phrase constrains the semantic function of a past participle pre-modifier. Some other scholars point out that genitive and adverbial phrase also can work as pre-modifiers (Quirk et al., 1985).

These ideas above are very helpful to the following researchers in the field. However, they are not complete enough and can only be a part of the classification of pre-modifiers. In order to teach students or do further research, a complete and exhausted classification is necessary. In the following part of this paper, the author will comprehend others' helpful opinions and try to form a clear structure of a new classification of pre-modifiers in English noun phrases.

### 3. A New Approach to Pre-modifiers

#### 3.1 A Redefinition of Modifiers and Pre-modifiers

Based on the discussion of different definitions, this paper redefines modifiers in noun phrases semantically, formally and syntactically. A modifier is a direct but optional element of the noun phrase which indicates the qualities or attributes of the head noun, such as appearance, size, color, material, location in space and time, shape, age, various properties and states. Modifiers could be adjectives and adjective phrases, nouns and noun phrases, prepositions and prepositional phrases, *to*-infinitive, participle phrases, relative clause, etc. Those modifiers which precede the noun head are called pre-modifiers, those which follow the noun head are called post-modifiers.

#### 3.2 A New Classification of Pre-modifiers

After discussing the merits and drawbacks of previous theories, this paper tries to give a new classification of pre-modifier in English noun phrases. Different from the perspective of semantic features, the criteria of this classification is based on word class. There are mainly six types of pre-modifier items: 1). adjectival pre-modifiers; 2). nominal pre-modifiers; 3). participle pre-modifiers; 4). genitive pre-modifiers; 5). adverb phrases pre-modifiers; 6). sentences, etc.

##### 3.2.1 Adjectival Pre-modifiers

Just as the name implies, when the pre-modifiers are adjectives or adjective phrases, then we call it adjectival pre-modifiers. According to the syntactic function, they can be sub-classified into three categories:

(1) Both attributive and predicative, e.g.,:

*a hungry man --- the man is hungry*

(2) Attributive only, e.g.,:

*an utter fool --- \* the fool is utter*

(3) predicative only, e.g.,:

*\* a loath woman --- the woman is loath to admit it*

Furthermore, the order of the adjectival pre-modifiers is also an important issue. Seen from semantic perspective, Jin (1996) describes a general order structure:

Time> space> color> material> function

If we try to order it according to their word class, commonly we have:

Participles+ adjectives+ head noun

Or adjectives+ participles+ noun+ head noun

There are also other types of order, but the fundamental rule is that the one which expresses more substantive characteristics comes closer to the head noun.

### 3.2.2 Nominal Pre-modifiers;

When the pre-modifiers are nouns or noun phrases, then we call them nominal pre-modifiers. This paper will not adopt the sub-classifications of nominal pre-modifiers of Biber et al. (2000, pp. 590-591). They classify nominal pre-modifiers based on the semantic features. For example,

**Table 5. Types of Nominal Pre-modifiers with Examples**

<b>Types of nominal pre-modifiers</b>	<b>Examples</b>
intention	<i>safty device</i>
identity	<i>member country</i>
content	<i>market report</i>
time	<i>sunday school</i>
<b>Singular nominal pre-modifiers</b>	<b>Plural nominal pre-modifiers</b>
<i>bed and breakfast accommodation</i>	<i>arms race</i>
<i>life story</i>	<i>arts centre</i>

It can never be exhaustive if we classify them in this way. Thus, this paper will classify them according to their formality: singular nominal pre-modifiers and plural nominal pre-modifiers (Chen Guohua in press).

Still we have to notice the relationship between adjectival pre-modifiers and nominal pre-modifiers. For example, *a history teacher and a historical play*. History and historical have the same root and their meanings are almost the same. Sometimes, we can change a nominal pre-modifier with a corresponding adjectival one. However, we can say energy crisis, but it is wrong to say \* energetic crisis. Another example is finance minister and \*financial minister. It is important to notice the differences and similarities between nominal and adjectival pre-modifiers (Yu, 2000).

### 3.2.3 Participle Pre-modifiers

Participle pre-modifiers can be further divided into *-ed* participles and *-ing* participles pre-modifiers. The examples are as follows: for *-ed* participles pre-modifiers, like *a dressed person or developed countries*; *for -ing* participles pre-modifiers, like *a time-consuming job or developing countries*.

### 3.2.4 Genitive Pre-modifiers

Unlike the last three types of pre-modifiers, genitive is a minor type of pre-modifiers, for example: *his fisherman's cottage, Mary's car and Mike's pen*, etc.

### 3.2.5 Adverb Phrases Pre-modifiers

Another minor type of pre-modifier is the adverb phrases. For example,

[1] *She traveled to many far-away places.*

[2] *I have this strange under-the-weather feeling.*

There are many kinds of adverb phrases working as pre-modifiers. The following table illustrates the sub-classifications of adverb phrases pre-modifiers. Some of them are common expressions.

**Table 6. Types of Adverb Phrases and Examples**

<i>Types of adverb phrases</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Prepositionals+noun</i>	<i>Behind-the-scenes practice</i>
<i>Numeral+noun</i>	<i>A ten-year old pupil</i>
<i>Adj./adv.+to infinite</i>	<i>hard-to-get material</i>
<i>Idiom original ones</i>	<i>An under-the-weather feeling</i>

Since the range of adverb phrases are too wide to be exhaustive, this paper only illustrates some of the examples. As a matter of fact, it is not important to calculate how many kinds of adverb phrases pre-modifiers because most of them are common expressions for learners.

### 3.2.6 Clauses as Pre-modifiers

Similar to adverb phrases pre-modifiers, sometimes a clause could work as a pre-modifier. For instance, *we need the do-what-you-want-and-take-what-you-need policy* or *a nothing-can-be-done attitude*. This kind of pre-modifiers is often seen on newspapers, magazines and is commonly used in oral English. It can express certain emotion of the speaker or writer. However, it is very informal and cannot be used in formal context.

## 4. Conclusions and Implications

The focus of this paper is the definition and classification of pre-modifiers in noun phrases. Some grammarians (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Quirk et al., 1985) describe a general picture when define pre-modifiers, while others only focus on the meaning and practical usage (Zhang, 1999; Kolln, 1996). The definition of Downing and Locke (2002, p. 445) focuses only on semantic features but ignore the

form and syntax. Based on the discussion of different definitions, this paper redefines modifiers in noun phrases semantically, formally and syntactically. A modifier is a direct but optional element of the noun phrase which indicates the qualities or attributes of the head noun, such as appearance, size, color, material, location in space and time, shape, age, various properties and states. Modifiers could be adjectives and adjective phrases, nouns and noun phrases, prepositions and prepositional phrases, *to*-infinitive, participle phrases, relative clause, etc. Those modifiers which precede the noun head are called pre-modifiers; those which follow the noun head are called post-modifiers. This paper also forms a new classification of pre-modifiers. Huddleston and Pullum (2008) only focus on the relationship between different elements within the noun phrases. Downing and Locke (2002) adopt a semantic point of view to classify pre-modifiers into epithets and classifiers only according to the meaning, context and environment. It is not a reliable clarification since semantic feature is too flexible to work as the criteria of a structural classification. Different from the perspective of semantic features, the criteria of this classification is based on word class. There are mainly six types of pre-modifier items: 1). adjectival pre-modifiers; 2). nominal pre-modifiers; 3). participle pre-modifiers; 4). genitive pre-modifiers; 5). adverb phrases pre-modifiers; 6). sentences, etc.

The implications of this research contribute to the existing literature as well as to the practice of grammar teaching in English classes. Some grammatical structures like noun phrases require a more complex classification than others, it poses difficulties for teachers in teaching practice (Graus & Coppin, 2015). Forming a better understanding of definitions and classifications of the structures of noun phrases will provide a clearer picture for English learners (Nan, 2015; Zhang, 2009; Rutherford, 2014). Furthermore, teaching of grammar, noun phrases in particular, could be boring for students, so that students may lose interest during the process of learning. They may not be able to concentrate and be distracted. Thus, grammar teaching requires a new teaching approach that may attract students' attention and engage students for a relatively long time, enough for the completion of teaching and exercise. Applying multi-media in teaching tasks with the integration of technology could be a useful solution to this problem (Blasco-Arcas, Buil, Hernández-Ortega, & Sese, 2013). For instance, with the integration of technology teachers may be able to provide instant feedbacks to students in their grammar practice (Kılıçkaya, 2019). Learners today are more open to accept these new approaches than ever before. Also, another useful way of teaching grammar is to apply flipped class teaching approach (Hung, 2015; Mehring, 2016). It provides great opportunity for students to become more autonomous learners and discover uses of grammar in language studying.

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