

They have a *larger* house *than yours*.

The *easiest* boys *to teach* were in my class.

- The emotionally disturbed and the physically and mentally handicapped* need the aid of society. [4]
The very wise avoid such temptations. [5]
The young in spirit enjoy life. [6]
The old who resist change are brushed aside. [7]

NOTE

[a] An adjective modified by *enough*, *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*.

It was *too boring* a book *to read*.

They are *so difficult* people *to please*.

- [7]
[8]
[9]

But with *enough* and *too*, this construction seems to be possible only if the adjective phrase is part of the subject complement or object complement:

**Brave enough* a student *to attempt the course* deserves to succeed. [7b]

With *so*, the construction is also possible if the adjective phrase is part of the subject:

A man *so difficult* } *to please* must be hard to work with.
So difficult a man }

[b] Exceptionally, certain short prepositional phrases may also premodify an adjective in attributive position:

a *by no means* irresponsible action
 ~ an action (which is) by no means irresponsible

Adjectives as heads of noun phrases

Adjectives can function as heads of noun phrases, which (like all noun phrases) can be subject of the sentence, complement, object, and prepositional complement. Adjectives as noun-phrase heads, unlike nouns, do not inflect for number or for the genitive case and they usually require a definite determiner.

Adjectives are typically used as heads of noun phrases to refer to certain fairly well-established classes of persons: *eg: the brave, the weak, the maladjusted, the elderly, the underprivileged*.

There are three types of adjectives functioning as noun-phrase heads, and these are exemplified in the following sentences:

- (a) *The innocent* are often deceived by *the unscrupulous*. (7.11)
 (b) *The industrious Dutch* are admired by their neighbours. (7.12)
 (c) She admires *the mystical*. (7.13)

Type (a): *the innocent*

Adjectives which can premodify personal nouns (*the young people*) can be noun-phrase heads (*the young*) with plural and generic reference denoting classes, categories, or types of people. The adjective can itself be premodified [3–5] or postmodified [6–7]:

- The poor* are causing the nation's leaders great concern. [1]
 There is a lack of communication between *the young* and *the old*. [2]
The extremely old need a great deal of attention. [3]

NOTE

[a] Modification of the adjective is usually restrictive, *eg* [5]: *the very wise*. Inflected comparison forms of the adjective are also possible (*the wiser*). Comparative inflection and adverb modification are indications of the adjective status of these noun-phrase heads, while modification by adjectives (as in *the hungry poor*) is more typical of nouns, and modification by relative clauses is normally an indication of noun status.

[b] The definite determiner is normally the generic definite article *the*. Note, however, the use of the possessive determiner in:

We will nurse *your sick*, clothe *your naked*, and feed *your hungry*.
 It is the duty of the Government to care for *our poor*, *our unemployed*.

The adjectives can function without a determiner if they are conjoined (*cf* 5.20):

He is acceptable to *both (the) old and (the) young*.

Also in some *of*-constructions:

The number of *jobless* is rising.

Type (b): *the Dutch*

Some adjectives denoting nationalities (*cf* 5.33f) can be noun-phrase heads:

The industrious Dutch are admired by their neighbours.
You French and we British ought to be allies.

As with type (a) in 7.11, these noun phrases normally have generic reference and take plural concord. The adjectives in question are restricted to words ending in *-(i)sh* (*eg: British, Spanish, Welsh*), *-ch* (*eg: Dutch, French*), *-ese* (*eg: Chinese, Japanese*), and the adjective *Swiss*.

NOTE These adjectives can in turn be modified by adjectives, which are normally nonrestrictive:

the industrious Dutch ['the Dutch, who are industrious']

Postmodifying prepositional phrases and relative clauses can be either restrictive or nonrestrictive (*cf* 17.3):

The Irish (who live) in America retain sentimental links with Ireland.
The Dutch, for many of whom speaking English is second nature, have produced many of the greatest grammarians of the English language.

Type (c): *the mystical*

Some adjectives can function as noun-phrase heads with abstract reference. They include, in particular, superlatives, in which case we can sometimes insert a general noun like *thing* in its abstract sense: