# Noun Complements vs. Post-Nominal Modifiers 

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## 1. Introduction

As we saw in Chapters 9 and 10 of Understanding English Grammar, both Complementation and Modification are very general syntactic functions that may occur within any phrasal category. The essential difference between these functions is that Complements are Licensed by their Heads, whereas Modifiers are not. The notion of licensing (sometimes called SANCTIONING or GOVERNMENT) is extremely useful in understanding and communicating important features of the grammar of any language. The idea is that certain phrasal categories "need" something in addition to the Head in order to express a complete meaning. The syntactic Head expresses the meaning incompletely in itself, and therefore requires (i.e., licenses) another element to complete it. This is what Complements do -- they "complete" the meaning of a phrase. Modifiers, on the other hand, may add interesting and important information, but are not licensed by their Heads. Rather, they simply enrich (i.e., fill in some details of) the idea being expressed. Modifiers aren't necessary for the expression of a complete idea. This conceptual distinction is summarized in the following statements:

- For meanings that license Complements: COMPLETE IDEA $=$ HEAD + COMPLEMENT
- For meanings that do not license Complements:

COMPLETE IDEA = HEAD
ENRICHED COMPLETE IDEA = HEAD+MODIFIER
For example, prepositions are very good examples of words that express partial ideas and therefore need Complements. Most prepositions express relational notions. A relation is not complete unless there are two things being related. Therefore a preposition cannot do its job if there is nothing that it relates to:
(1) a. I depend on you fitly to provide for her.
b. Readers of the novel may come to different conclusions.

In example 1a, the the prepositions on and for relate the pronouns you and her respectively to the rest of the clause. Even though the prepositions are the syntactic Heads of the prepositional phrases (see Chapter 7), they need a noun phrase (explicitly mentioned or strongly implied) in order for the relational notions they express to be complete. The pronouns you and her serve this "completing" function in this example, and are therefore the Complements of their prepositions. In example 1b, the determined noun phrase (DP) different conclusions must appear with the preposition to in order for the intended meaning to be expressed. Yes, the sentence is grammatical without different conclusions, but the meaning of the predicate is then quite different:
(2) Readers of the novel may come to (e.g., after having been rendered unconscious by severe boredom).

Prepositions are obvious examples of Heads of phrases that require Complements. Others include Inflectional elements in inflected verb phrases (examples in 3, discussed more fully in Chapter 8, p. 196 ff .), Determiners in determined noun phrases (examples in 4, and Chapter 8, p. 186 ff .), and genitive case markers in genitive phrases (example 5, and Chapter 8, p. 192 ff. ):
(3) a. Today he phoned me just as I was getting into the bath.
b. We were the young rebels.
c. Marriage must be like that.
d. They nodded, smiled affably and walked past.
(4) a. This collection of articles sketches the complexity of the subject.
b. Alkalinity is not a measure of how alkaline a solution is.
c. So she took up their banner when she was Prime Minister.
(5) Gretchen's salad spinner is broken.

The italicized portions of these sentences are clear and uncontroversial examples of Complements. They are not the syntactic Heads of their phrasal categories (underlined), but in each case, the phrase would be ungrammatical without them.

As we also saw in Chapter 9, verbs can have Complements or Modifiers, and for this reason it may sometimes be difficult to tell for sure whether a particular verb phrase constituent is one or the other. For example, consider the following:
(6) a. The cat crept under the bed.
b. The cat crept on her belly.

While the italicized portions of these sentences seem to fill the same role in each case, there is evidence that the under the bed is a Complement in 6a, and on her belly is a Modifier in 6b. Consider these "inversion" constructions (see Chapter 9, p. 220 ff.):
(7) a. Under the bed crept the cat.
b. ??On her belly crept the cat.

Complements can participate in such constructions, while Modifiers less easily so. The reason for this seems to be that Complements are more central to the idea being expressed than are Modifiers. In 6a, the main point the speaker is making is that the cat ended up under the bed, and "creeping" is just the way she got there. In 6 b , on the other hand, the main point seems to be that the cat was creeping, and on her belly just describes the scene in a little more detail. While one may quibble with these intuitive judgements, the inversion facts provide concrete evidence that these two clause constituents have different syntactic functions.

## 2. Noun Complementation vs. post-nominal Modification

Most simple Modifiers within noun phrases are pre-nominal, i.e., they occur before the Head of the phrase. However, a significant subset of noun phrase Modifiers occur after their heads. Such post-nominal Modifiers tend to be "heavier" (more complex in structure) than simple adjectives or other word classes. Since noun Complements always follow their Heads, sometimes it may be difficult, or even impossible, to distinguish Complements and post-nominal Modifiers. Consider the following pairs of noun phrases:
(8) a. a jar of jelly
b. a jar in the refrigerator
c. a book of poetry
d. a book with a leather cover
e. a student of chemistry
f. a student with long hair
g. a change in plans
h. a change of a dubious nature

It may seem at first that the italicized prepositional phrases in all of these examples are filling a post-nominal Modification function, as discussed in Chapter 10, p. 240 ff. However, there is a subtle difference between the members of each pair. If both prepositional phrases are used in one noun phrase, I believe most English speakers will agree that one order is clearly preferable to the other:
(9) a. a jar of jelly in the refrigerator
b. ??a jar in the refrigerator of jelly
c. a book of poetry with a leather cover
d. ??a book with a leather cover of poetry
e. a student of chemistry with long hair
f. ??a student with long hair of chemistry
g. a change in plans of a dubious nature
h. ?? a change of a dubious nature in plans

It seems that certain post-nominal elements are happier occuring close to the Head, while others gravitate toward the end. One way of accounting for this difference is the notion of licensing. There is something about the meanings of the Heads of these
noun phrases that unites them more tightly to certain identifying phrases, but not others. ${ }^{1}$ For example, jars are "containers", therefore they are very likely to be identified according to some substance that they might contain. If I say "there's a jar of jelly in the refrigerator", the hearer is probably more interested in the jelly than in the jar per se. It may be in a jar, cup, bottle, bowl or any other container, but the jelly is what matters. Linguists would say that the meaning of the word jar as a container "licenses" a Complement that refers to the contents of the jar. Of course there are a lot of other things one can say about a jar as a physical object, like where it is located, how big it is, who it belongs to, etc. But its contents are higher on the list of probable ways of identifying the jar than any such random property.

A similar story can be told about the noun book. Books are like jars in that they have contents. Although the content of a book is not some physical substance, still we can think of a book as a container. What it contains may be information, instructions, stories, poetry, literature, etc. We are much more likely to be interested in a book because of its content rather than some random property like its color, size, etc. What is important about a jar or a book is what it contains. This is why we say that these words license a prepositional phrase that refers to their contents.

The other noun phrases illustrated above also license certain Complements. A student is someone who studies some subject, therefore academic subjects, such as chemistry or linguistics, are very salient ways of identifying students. Anyone can have long hair -- this is a random property, like height, weight, location, national origin, etc. These are legitimate and potentially important was of identifying some person, including students. But students are people who study academic subjects, like chemistry. This is central to the meaning of the word student.

The last pair of examples ( 9 g and h ) show that this notion of licensing is not simply a characteristic of prepositional phrases with of. While it may be the case that of phrases make very good noun Complements, this is not just a mechanistic feature of the word of -- it follows from the meaning of the prepositional phrase relative to the head. Of phrases typically refer to central, rather than incidental properties of things (house of cards, quart of milk, man of means, etc.), but they don't have to. Example 9h shows that when the of phrase refers to a non-essential property, it also has the syntactic function of

[^0]Modifier rather than Complement. And in this case a prepositional phrase headed by in serves the Complement function.

## 3. Different types of noun Complements

Chapter 9 of Understanding English Grammar describes a continuum between Complementation and Modification. There are very clear examples of Complementation, and very clear examples of Modification, but there are also many examples that fall somewhere in between the clear extremes. Chapter 9 concentrates on Predicate Complementation, and Chapter 10 concentrates on Modification within the noun phrase.

As mentioned above, within noun phrases post Head Modifiers tend to be "heavy," and include prepositional phrases (examples 10a-c), and relative clauses (examples 10d-e):
(10) Corpus examples of noun phrases with post-nominal Modifiers:
a. He treats [ patients with head injuries ].
b. Did it really have [ people in your age group ]?
c. In addition to the collection was his [ magnificent library of 4800 volumes ],
d. [ one of his ex students who now works in educational technology ] is one of the [ volunteers who has come forward ].
e. there's a [ few questions I've got ta ask you ]
f. Once I urged on her a [ walk which I had taken with [ children I knew ] and which had seemed very easy to me ].

Example 10 f is particularly interesting in that it contains one noun phrase (headed by walk) modified by two relative clauses (both introduced by which) and containing another noun phrase, modified by yet another relative clause (children I knew). Post-nominal Modification of this sort is extremely common, particularly in writing.

In this section, we will discuss Complementation in noun phrases. As with Predicate Complementation, we find that there is a continuum between Complementation and Modification in noun phrases as well. In particular, post-nominal Modification (as illustrated in 10) shades into and overlaps considerably with noun Complementation.

The sense that some Complements are obligatory arises simply because they carry so much relative semantic weight that the phrase is uninterpretable without them. In Chapter 9, this continuum was illustrated for Predicate Complements (see Figure 9.1, p. 215). The same sort of continuum can be illustrated for noun Complements. However, as we also saw in Chapter 9, obligatoriness is only one property of Complements, and not every Complement is, strictly speaking, obligatory. In fact, there is a continuum between prototypical Complements and prototypical Modifiers based on their semantic "weight" relative to the Head -- constituents that express a lot of semantic content necessary for the interpretation of a whole phrase are very good examples of Complements, whereas those that express ancillary, but non-essential semantic content are likely to be Modifiers.

Let's look at a minimal pair of examples that illustrate a prototypical noun Complement (11a) in contrast with a prototypical postnominal Modifier (11b):
(11) a. He has published a passel of stories. ${ }^{2}$
b. He has published a book about American structuralism.

The noun passel doesn't really express very much semantic content on its own. What is "a passel" anyway? We can't even picture one without imagining a passel of something. Semantically, it really functions almost like a quantifier, rather than the Head of the phrase (see Chapter 10, p. 233 ff . for a discussion of the occasional ambiguity between prenominal quantifiers and quantity nouns). The phrase a passel does not seem complete without some additional information added. Thus, most of the semantic content of the phrase passel of stories is expressed via the prepositional phrase rather than the head. For this reason, of stories seems obligatory and therefore can be insightfully thought of as a Complement rather than a Modifier. The noun book, on the other hand, does express a fair amount of semantic content on its own. We can imagine a prototypical book; we can easily count books, quantify them and use the word book with or without Modifiers. The phrase about American structuralism in example 11b just further specifies what kind of book is intended, but is not required for the phrase to be coherent. These two examples, therefore, illustrate clear cases of a noun phrase with a Complement and a noun phrase with a post-nominal Modifier: when the Head is relatively low in semantic content, the following element is likely to be a Complement. When the Head is rich enough in semantic content to express a coherent meaning on its own, the following element is likely to be a Modifier.

### 3.1. Quantity nouns

Now let's look at the continuum in more detail. The best examples of noun Complements are those that are absolutely obligatory -- virtually all the semantic content expressed by the noun phrase is expressed in the Complement rather than the Head. Nouns expressing extreme quantities, such as passel in example 11a, seem to always require a Complement either stated or at least strongly implied, usually a prepositional phrase headed by of. Some additional examples are given in 12 :
a. A surfeit of sorrow . . . *They experienced a sufeit.
b. A plethora of advice . . . *We had the biggest plethora.
c. A paucity of evidence . . . ??That paucity was unavoidable.
d. Not one iota of truth . . . *That statement had three iotas.
e. oodles of instructions . . . *How many oodles are there?

[^1]Other quantity nouns (ton, quart, spoonful, gram, piece, etc.) may not as strictly require a Complement, though a following phrase (stated or implied) seems almost essential to their interpretation. For example, a phrase like one gram is an abstract quantity concept unless the substance being measured is expressed, or understood from the context:
(13) a. Yeah it hits you like a ton of bricks.
b. They consumed practically a quart of maple ice-cream.
c. She helped herself to a spoonful of sage and onion stuffing .
d. There wouldn't be a stick of furniture neither!
e. You were out here swimming around with not a stitch on

As mentioned in Chapter 6, some quantity nouns can be used by themselves, but they always imply a particular substance, for example, a stitch without a Complement is understood to be an item of clothing (13e), while a stick with no Complement stated or implied from the context, will be understood as a stick of wood. However, example 13d shows that stick can function as a quantity noun when used with an explicit Complement.

### 3.2. Deverbal activity nouns

Some other classes of nouns seem to require explicit or understood Complements to a greater or lesser degree. These include activity nouns (sometimes called deverbal NOUNS) related to intransitive verbs that take UNDERGOER subjects:
(14) a. The economy collapsed. $\rightarrow$ the collapse of the economy . . .
b. The flight departed. $\rightarrow$ the departure of the flight $\ldots$
c. The Jedi returned. $\rightarrow$ the return of the Jedi . .
d. Our plans changed. $\rightarrow$ our change in plans . . .

Activity nouns related to verbs that take Direct Objects (transitive verbs) may also take noun Complements:
(15) a. They lack water. $\rightarrow$ their lack of water $\ldots$
b. We perused the documents. $\rightarrow$ our perusal of the documents . . .
c. They stole cash and gems. $\rightarrow$ the theft of cash and gems . . .
d. Someone read the lesson. $\rightarrow$ the reading of the lesson . . .

To this point, all the examples of noun Complements we've seen have been prepositional phrases, usually headed by $o f$. However, the function of noun Complementation can be filled by a number of syntactic categories. In particular, when a deverbal noun is based on a transitive verb that takes a Clausal Object as its Complement, the form of the noun Complement is likely to be the same as the form of the corresponding Clausal Object. We will call these harmonic noun Complements, because their forms "harmonize" with the form of the Clausal Object of the corresponding verb. Many, but not all, nouns that take harmonic Complements describe utterance (speaking) or cognition (thinking) concepts:
(16) a. They decided to cancel the project. $\rightarrow$ the decision to cancel the project . . .
b. They claimed there was no evidence. $\rightarrow$ the claim there was no evidence . . .
c. They propose that all men are created equal $\rightarrow$ the proposition that all men are created equal . . .
d. They argued that paper clips have increased $\rightarrow$ the argument that paper clips have increased
e. She explained that it was just to eliminate him $\rightarrow$ the explanation that it was just to eliminate him
f. They insinuated that he was a crook. $\rightarrow$ the insinuation that he was a crook.
g. I expect that she will be late. $\rightarrow$ the expectation that she will be late.
h. They permitted him to hunt cougars. $\rightarrow$ a permit to hunt cougars.

In example 16h, the verb permit is a manipulation verb, rather than an utterance or cognition verb, yet its nominal form also takes a harmonic Complement.

This tendency for noun Complements to harmonize with corresponding Clausal Objects does not apply in all situations:
(17) a. She loves to sing in the opera. $\rightarrow$ *the love to sing in the opera.
b. They saw her get onto the bus. $\rightarrow$ *the sight (her) get onto the bus.
c. I expect her to be late. $\rightarrow$ *the expectation (her) to be late.
d. She told him to get onto the bus. $\rightarrow$ *the telling (him) to get onto the bus.
e. He said "I'm getting on the bus" $\rightarrow$ ??his saying "I'm getting on the bus."

As mentioned above, harmonic noun Complements are much more likely following deverbal nouns that express activities of utterance or cognition.

### 3.3. Other nouns referring to utterance or cognition activities

Certain nouns that are not related to specific verbs, yet nevertheless describe instances of language or thought also take Complements. For example, a rumor consists of comments that someone passes to someone else, a truth is a statement that is true, etc. Such nouns, including story, hint, news, etc. can often be followed by a complement that describes the content of the head noun in more detail:
(18) a. . . . that statement about anyone holding the office of Home Secretary . . .
b. . . . the news that Esher has become Liberal, . . .
c. . . . the truth that all men are created equal . .
d. . . . the story that I am now in a different body.
e. Nor did she fail to take the hint that his only reason for the embrace had been to comfort her.

### 3.4. Miscellaneous nouns that take Complements

Finally, a few additional nouns that don't seem to fall neatly into any of the three previous categories also often occur with Complements:
a. It's just a fact of modern life.
b. the fact that you don't remember my name . . .
c. the reason you don't remember my name . . .
d. the sense to reach for the carrot.
e. the sense of life being lived on the edge.
f. the impression that two gentlemen concerned are very enthusiastic Europeans
g. the way you found her. . .
h. the sound of rain on the roof
i. a feeling of dread
j. the sweet smell of success

While facts, reasons, etc. can be expressed in words, they are not concepts that inherently refer to instances of language, as are stories, news, etc. Many of the nouns of this class express sensory impressions, sight, sound, feeling, taste, smell, etc.

## 4. Summary of Complementation and post-nominal Modification in noun phrases

So we've seen that various types of nouns are more or less likely to "take" Complements than others. These are summarized in Table 1. We can say, then, that to a certain extent the presense, and even the form, of a Complement depends on the semantic type of noun that functions as the Head of the phrase. Various linguists would say that nouns may license or Sanction, or govern Complements.

| Table 1: Nouns that take post-nominal Complements (NC) and Modifiers (PM) |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Extreme Quantity expressions | Fixed Quantity expressions | Deverbal nouns of utterance and cognition | Other nouns of utterance and cognition | Other nouns |
| NC: an iota of truth PM: ?an iota with spots on it | NC : a quart of milk PM: a quart in a bottle | NC: a belief in the hereafter PM: a belief that he holds | NC: the rumor that she was running for office PM : the rumor that she told me | NC: The last time I saw her face PM: The last time when we were in Paris |

## 5. Noun Complements vs. other structures

In this section, we will look at noun Complements in light of other classes of structures with which they share properties, and will consider some of the evidence that distinguishes noun Complements from these other structures.

### 5.1. Relative clauses

Relative clauses are clauses that function as Modifiers within noun phrases (see Chapter 14, p347 ff). In the following corpus examples, the Head noun is underlined and the Modifying relative clause is in italics:
(20) a. products upon which Mellor built his reputation
b. the 40 per cent gap which built up as institutions took a dimmer view of the market.
c. No,'t is resistance that inflames desire . . .
d. New York is a place where people of many different cultures live and work together.
e. The 1960's was a time when many Americans began to question the actions of their government.
f. The book I'm reading came from the library.

Clausal noun Complements share certain properties with relative clauses, including the following:

- They are post-nominal (they follow a noun within a noun phrase).
- Semantically, they add some information about their nominal Head.
- They may be fully finite, participial (semi-finite) or infinitival.
- They are often introduced by that.

However, in addition to these similarities, the grammatical differences between relative clauses and noun Complements are significant enough that it makes sense to treat them as filling distinct functions.

First, relative clauses are not complete in themselves. They always involve some element (the "R-element", see Chapter 14, p. 347 ff .) either a relative pronoun (who, whom, which, why, when, or where), or an anaphoric "gap" that refers to the Head of the phrase. For example, the following example gives the relative clauses in 20 with the Relement circled:
(21) a. products upon which Mellor built his reputation
b. the 40 per cent gapwhich built up as institutions took a dimmer view of the market.
c. No,'t is resistance that GAP inflames desire . . .
d. New York is a placewherepeople of many different cultures live and work together.
e. The 1960's was a time when many Americans began to question the actions of their government.
f. The book I'm reading (GAP) came from the library.

Notice that the italicized clauses, although they are fully finite, are not complete in themselves. They are grammatically dependent on the larger construction even if they are preceded by the relativizer that. ${ }^{3}$ Clausal noun Complements, on the other hand, do not contain a reference to the Head, and if they follow that, they are identical to fully independent clauses (see the examples 19b, c, and fabove).

Second, relative clauses are Modifiers, not Complements. Of course, as mentioned several times in this section, as well as in Chapters 9 and 10 of Understanding English Grammar, the difference between Modification and Complementation is a continuum, therefore there are some indeterminate cases. However, a strong argument can be made that relative clauses are always "optional" from a grammatical perspective, whereas noun Complements are often obligatory. Of course, saying that a relative clause is grammatically "optional" is not at all the same thing as saying it is "unimportant." Indeed, very important and interesting information can be expressed by any Modifier, including relative clauses, as can easily be seen by inspection of the examples in 21.

### 5.2. Appositive clauses

Some approaches to English grammar (e.g., Greenbaum and Quirk 2002:371) consider most or all of the clausal noun Complements discussed in this section to be "appositive clauses". The following is a quote with the examples provided:

The appositive clause resembles the relative clause in being capable of introduction by that, . . . It differs in that the head of the noun phrase must be an abstract noun such as fact, presupposition, reply, remark, answer and the like. For example:

The belief that no one is infallible is well-founded.
I agree with the old saying that absense makes the heart grow fonder.
(Greenbaum and Quirk 2002:371)

While noun Complements of all types resemble appositive elements in certain ways, there are also distinct in the following respects. First, prototypical appositive elements are coreferential with their Heads. For this reason, appositives and Heads can typically occur in either order (examples in 22). This is not true of noun Complements of any sort, including those that are clauses (examples in 23):

Noun Phrases with an appositive Modifier (in italics):
a. the dissident playwright, Vaclav Havel . . .
b. Vaclav Havel, the dissident playwright . . .
c. My son John is a doctor.
d. John my son is a doctor.

[^2]a. the belief that no one is infallible $\neq \quad$ *hat no one is infallible the belief $/$ *the that no one is infallible belief
b. the decision to cancel the project $\neq$ *to cancel the project the decision $/ *$ the to cancel the project decision
c. their lack of water $\neq{ }^{*}$ of water their lack / *their of water lack

Second, it is fairly clear that appositive elements are Modifiers rather than Complements (though again since Modification vs. Complementation is a continuum and not an absolute distinction, there exist indeterminate cases). Evidence that appositive elements are Modifiers is that in all cases, the noun phrase would be complete without the appositive element. There is no such thing as an obligatory Modifier:
a. My son John is a doctor.
b. My son is a doctor.
c. Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn, grew lean . . .
d. Miniver Cheevy grew lean . . .
e. It was a bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster -- the period of soya beans and Basic English -- . . .
f. It was a bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster ...
g. Residents have proposed new laws designed to restrict hunting--laws that have nothing to do with game protection or safety.
h . Residents have proposed new laws designed to restrict hunting.
i. I strolled through the graveyard, the most peaceful spot in town.
j. I strolled through the graveyard.
k. A fierce competitor, a daring runner, and a solid hitter, Jackie Robinson led the Brooklyn Dodgers .

1. Jackie Robinson led the Brooklyn Dodgers . . .

In each pair of examples in 24, it is clear that without the appositive Modifiers (in italics), the sentences are still fully grammatical. The appositive elements certainly add important and interesting information, but they are not required for grammaticality. Recall that prototypical Complements are elements that "complete" their phrasal category. While some Complements may seem optional, if they are omitted a significantly different sense is expressed (see examples 1 and 2 above). Modifiers, such as the appositive phrases illustrated in 24 , however are always optional from a grammatical point of view.

## 6. Conclusion

In this section we have looked at noun Complementation and post-nominal Modification. A noun Complement is a constituent of a noun phrase that is not the Head, yet is in some sense required in order to "complete" the meaning of the whole noun phrase. In some
cases, this means a noun Complement is grammatically obligatory, while other times the Complement is simply needed in order to impart the sense intended by the speaker -- if it is omitted and not strongly implied, the result may be grammatical, but have a significantly different meaning.

Like all phrasal categories, noun phrases may contain Modifiers as well as Complements. Noun Complements are usually post-nominal -- they come after their heads. This fact means they share properties with post-nominal Modifiers, such as appositives and relative clauses. However, there are enough properties that distinguish noun Complements from these other structures that it makes sense to keep them distinct.

The notion of licensing helps us understand the relationship between Heads and Complements within any phrasal category. Largely because of their semantic properties, certain structures allow or require certain types of Complements. A good portion of knowing, using and understanding the grammar of any language is being aware of what kinds of Complements substantive words, such as nouns and verbs, license. For this reason, whenever second language learners encounter a new verb or noun, it helps to learn the various "frames" in which it may occur. This will not only help ingrain the new word in the right contexts, but can also provide insights into its precise meaning.


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ There is considerable discussion in the Cognitive Linguistics literature concerning different "construals" of items referenced by nouns (see, e.g., Radden and Dirven 2007). For example, a speaker may use the word jar construing it either as a physical object or as a container for some some salient content. If I say: "That's an intriguing jar" I'm talking about a physical object, regardless of what it may be used for. If I say: "There's a jar of honey in the cupboard", what's probably of interest is the honey, and the jar is just a way of classifying or quantifying it. Books are similar. If I say, "This book has a pretty cover" I'm talking about the book as a thing. If I say "This book has an exciting conclusion", I'm talking about its content. It is the construal of a jar or a book as a container that licenses a Complement. Occasionally, multiple possible construals can lead to amusing ambiguities. Consider a sentence like John just bought the London Times. The ambiguity here rests on the possible construals of the phrase the London Times. It could refer to a particular copy of a newspaper called "The London times" or to the company that publishes this paper.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ The expression passel of $X$ is pretty clearly an Americanism. It does not occur in the BNC, but occurs 127 times in the COCA. Although its origin is probably the word parcel, it has now clearly diverged from the original meaning. Items that in reality do not occur in parcels, can easily occur in "passels", e.g., $a$ passel of young ladies, a passel of children, a passel of pulsars, a passel of competing slates, a passel of folks, etc. (these are the first five examples of passel from the COCA).

[^2]:    ${ }^{3}$ See Understanding English Grammar, p 352 for evidence that that is not a relative pronoun.

