

A. grammatical background:

1. syntactic properties of expressions (including those comprising just one word): syntactic functions and syntactic categories

1.1. syntactic functions of expressions: an aspect of their external syntax

1.2. syntactic categories of expressions: linked to their syntactic functions by default associations (e.g., NP with Subject, DirectObject, PrepositionalObject, etc.) and by stipulation in particular constructions (e.g., NP allowed as Predicative in certain circumstances (*Kim is a linguist*), as Adverbial in certain circumstances (*I slept late **this morning***), etc.); manifested in their internal syntax (e.g., NP has N word as its central element)

1.3. note: particular categories can serve in functions other than the default ones (NP exx. above), and other categories can serve in the default functions: Clause as Subject or DirectObject (***That you've done such a good job on this project shows that you can take responsibility***), PP as Subject or PrepositionalObject (***Under the rug is a bad place to hide a gun, so I took the gun from under the rug***)

1.4. so we need different names for functions and categories

2. the world of As and A-als

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| A: | Adjective (Adj) | Adjectival (Adj-al): Modifier of N-type expression |
| | Adverb (Adv) | Adverbial (Adv-al): Modifier of other expression types (A-type, V-type, P-type, Clause) |

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| Adv: | A-Adv | A-Adv-al, a.k.a. Degree (Deg) |
| | V-Adv | V-Adv-al (of many different subtypes) |

...

Adj-als include: AdjP: *a **very large** cookie*
 N (in N+N compounds): *a very large **Christmas** cookie*
 Determiner (Det), and, more generally, DetP:
 ***very many** very large Christmas cookies*

Det is a function; Dets include:

Determinatives (CGEL: items especially devoted to the Det function), e.g.:

articles: *a, the*

demonstratives: *this, these, that, those*

quantifiers: *some, all, each, every*

Ns, like *lot, lots*: *a lot of trouble, lots of trouble*

possessive NPs: ***the Queen's** terrible troubles*

3. *lot* as a N:

- 3.1. has plural, *lots*
- 3.2. occurs with (certain) adjectives: *a whole lot*
- 3.3. occurs with indefinite article: *a lot* (note: *a whole lot*, *an awful lot*)
- 3.4. requires its N-type complement to be marked with *of*:
 - a whole lot of trouble*
 - **a whole lot trouble* (cf. *much trouble*)
 - cf.: *We expected trouble, and we got a whole lot (*of)*

so a N, but a very eccentric (“idiomatic”) one

B. General X, Specific Y: Y is X PLUS SOMETHING

1. *difficult* is *hard* plus something: AHD4 says that *hard* is "the most general term" (of *hard*, *difficult*, *arduous*), that *hard* and *difficult* are "interchangeable in many instances", but that *difficult* is “often preferable where the need for skill or ingenuity is required”. similar things in other sources. *hard* is the all-purpose word, *difficult* somewhat specialized.

2. JMS on *almost* and *nearly*: *nearly* is *almost* plus something

These two items are almost synonymous, but not necessarily nearly synonymous. They may well be truth conditionally equivalent, "almost P" and "nearly P" both entailing "not P" ... and "close to P". [but cf. *Almost/??Nearly no one was there.*]

... The difference would then have to be a difference in nuance, or connotation, or (more technically) conventional implicature. That difference, it seems to me, has to do with expectations: *Nearly n* connotes that *n* exceeds (hence is better than) what was expected or hoped for, while *almost n* does not conventionally connote any particular desire, hope or expectation, but easily supports a conversational implicature to the same effect as the conventional implicature associated with *nearly*.

<http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/004640.html>

3. (Jason Grafmiller) subordinator *once* is *after* (indicating temporal sequence) plus something (a presupposition or implicature that the event in the main clause is somehow contingent on the event in the subordinate clause):

After/??Once the ship came in, the storm subsided.

After/Once we went to New York, we went to Boston.

4. restrictive relativizers: *which* is *that* (marking a subordinate clause) plus something (anaphoricity and non-personal reference)

5. coming soon: sentence-initial connective *however* is *but* plus something

6. determiner *lot* is *much/many* (extent) plus something (significant extent)