# A GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH WORDS

HAROLD E. PALMER

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# A GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH WORDS

ONE THOUSAND ENGLISH WORDS AND THEIR PRONUNCIATION, TOGETHER WITH INFORMATION CONCERNING THE SEVERAL MEANINGS OF EACH WORD, ITS INFLECTIONS AND DERIVATIVES, AND THE COLLOCATIONS AND PHRASES INTO WHICH IT ENTERS

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# INTRODUCTION

#### I. What this Book Is

FIRST, as its title indicates, it is a grammar. It is not, however, the sort of grammar that contains chapters defining, describing and explaining respectively the noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, etc., in classified order, nor is it a grammar of which each chapter is devoted to some part of the sentence (subject, predicate, direct object, etc.); it contains, as a matter of fact, no chapters at all. Like a dictionary it is a collection of words in alphabetical order, but unlike a dictionary it gives the grammar of each word in detail; it is a

grammar of words.

Grammar in general may be that of forms or that of words. A grammar of forms treats of grammatical categories from the broadest down to the narrowest subdivision: such are the best-known and most popular grammars. The New Method Grammar is a book of that type. A grammar of words treats of the grammar pertaining to single words. A and the, for instance, are words which are traditionally and universally difficult on account of their grammatical peculiarities. Some and any, shall and will, do and have, and most of the prepositions and conjunctions are words that are difficult not only on account of their varied meanings but because each one is bound up with its particular grammalical usages. When the foreign student of English complains that English grammar is "difficult," or composes ungrammatical sentences and constructions, it is usually not because he is ignorant of the grammatical categories (noun, verb, subject, complement, interrogative, etc.), but because he is not aware of the grammatical peculiarities pertaining to individual words.

This book goes beyond what is indicated by its concise title. It might also be entitled: A Grammatical Dictionary of English Words. It is a manual of the usage of those English words that have been found by experience to constitute the bulk of learning-effort on the part of the student of English as a foreign language.

English contains about 20,000 words in fairly current use. Of these about 1000 present considerable difficulty to the foreign student of English; the remainder (apart from pronunciation) present little or no difficulty. It is in connection with these 1000 words that the great majority of mistakes in grammar and composition are made; it is these 1000 words that prevent the foreign student in the early stages from using English correctly and effectively.

These words are "difficult" for various reasons—reasons that are not apparent to those to whom English is the mother-tongue:

(1) each word may belong to two or more "parts of speech"; 1

(2) each word may have two or more meanings and "stretches of meaning," in some cases the number is very considerable; 2

(3) each word may enter into two or more "sentence-patterns" occupying its own particular place in the sentence (among the verbs alone nearly 30 distinct "patterns" are to be found); <sup>3</sup>

(4) each word may have several inflected forms and derivatives,

many of them being irregular in form and meaning; 4

(5) each word may enter into a large number of collocations and phrases (successions of two or more words the meaning of which can hardly be deduced from a knowledge of their component words); 5 some of these, again, may each have two or more meanings and stretches of meaning;

(6) each word may be a component part of one or more "compounds" (or "compound words") the meaning of which can hardly

be deduced from a knowledge of the component words; 7

It follows, therefore, that a vocabulary of 1000 head-words (caption-words, or words printed in bold type at the head of a paragraph in a dictionary) may represent 5000 or more "learning efforts" on the part of the student of English as a foreign language.

Contrary to popular belief, the solutions of these problems of word-learning are set out neither in the dictionary nor the ordinary grammar book. The dictionary treats in a more or less summary manner a vocabulary of from 25,000 to 100,000 words, generally giving examples only of abnormal, quaint or rare expressions, and leaving problems of sentence-building to the grammarian. On the other hand, the ordinary grammar book treats (often with a wealth of technical terms) only those aspects of vocabulary that are of interest to the grammarian; they are elaborate in details of theory, but

1 Thus the word since is a preposition, an adverb, and a conjunction.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the word think has about eight chief meanings, and so far as we know, each may be represented in the student's mother tongue by a different word.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the verb wish may be found in such combinations as wish something, wish for something, wish to do something, wish somebody to do something, wish

that something (would happen).

Thus under think we find thought, thoughtful(ly), thoughtless(ly), unthinkingly, etc., while wake provides woke, awake, awakening, etc., and just covers (in) justice, justify-fication, (un) just(ly), etc. While an officer may or may not be in charge of an office, a prisoner is certainly not in charge of a prison.

Thus at last, give up, let alone, go without, carry on, as a matter of fact, all at once, to say the least of it, give somebody up for lost, throw away, how do you do, let us make it do, etc., etc., must each be learnt as one learns single words.

Thus all at once may mean everyone at the same time or suddenly, and take

off may mean remove, start or caricature.

Thus a blackboard is often neither black nor a board, and a next-door neighbour does not live next to a door, while a warrior is not the current interpretation of a man-of-war.

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give few practical "directions for use" and neglect precisely those points that puzzle the foreign student of elementary present-day English. It is to be noted, moreover, that grammar books are generally written for the benefit of those who already know the language. It has been said that there is "a vast uncharted territory lying between the respective domains of the dictionary-maker and the grammarian," a sort of no-man's land in which reside the great majority of those points that perplex those to whom English is a foreign language.

Now the problems and perplexities that have always been the despair of the foreign student lose much of their difficulty when they are analysed, set out in systematic and orderly form, explained by means of a small but rational terminology, and illustrated by an abundance of common examples. The object of this Grammar is precisely to do this in connection with the thousand or so words which experience has shown to be the chief source of perplexity to

all who learn English as a foreign language.

# II. Certain Advantages of this Grammar

#### RICHNESS AND ABUNDANCE OF EXAMPLES

Many students of foreign languages, especially those who have little aptitude for theory, make progress in a language by dint of memorizing examples of the use of that language. Their material for memorizing is generally any or every sentence or phrase that they happen to meet with or that attracts their attention, regardless of its real value or degree of commonness. As a result we find them using rare, odd, quaint expressions unknown to present-day usage—many of them indeed furnished by those who have insufficient knowledge of the language. We find them at the same time, more often than not, ignorant of some of the commonest and most useful forms.

This Grammar of Words contains, among other features, a wealth of phrases, expressions and sentences typical of modern English in both its spoken and written forms. The foreign student of English may take any of these and commit it to memory in the knowledge that it is useful and productive. Moreover, each example memorized may serve as a key to many others, for the book has been composed as a co-ordinated whole.

#### VALUE IN CORRECTION OF COMPOSITION

The great majority of mistakes in composition by foreign students of English are made in connection with the words treated here. In correcting compositions, the teacher usually refers the student

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> To be precise: groups of words, a single word together with its inflected and derivative forms and all its meanings.

to some book of reference ("See Rule so-and-so") and the more conscientious teacher may spend a considerable time in making explanatory notes in the margin. Now, by referring the student to the appropriate word or words in this volume he can show him the nature of the mistake and enable him to correct it.

The student, for instance, may have written "I waited him since a long time." The teacher may usefully note in the margin "See wait, since and for." Or the student has written "I am sorry of what happened," and a reference to sorry will show him what is

wrong with the sentence.

This particular grammatical dictionary contains practically all the information necessary for the correction of the average composition of the average student.

#### NOT ONLY A REFERENCE BOOK

It will be noticed, too, that unlike a dictionary or grammar book this book may be used not only as a reference book but as an actual text-book. Pupils may profitably be assigned such lessons or homework as the study of some complicated form-word as shall or some, which will form the subject of a subsequent test. Such procedures as these may advantageously replace the old-fashioned memorizing of rules and exceptions.

# III. Special Grammatical Categories

In addition to the grammar- and word-categories that are usually provided in books of reference and language textbooks, a few novel and much-needed categories have been marked in the

present volume. Among these are:

1. "Countables" and "Uncountables." One of the greatest difficulties encountered by foreign students of English is to know when a noun refers to a thing that can be counted (e.g. a book, a house, a moment, an advantage, etc.), or to something that cannot be counted (e.g. water, snow, weather, bread, wisdom, dryness, etc.). For it is not enough (nor is it true) to say that the names of material substances and abstract things are used without a or an, and that they are not used in the plural. There are many cases in which the noun stands for things countable or uncountable often according to the sense in which it is used, but often quite arbitrarily. Thus, for instance, the word wood refers to something uncountable in made of wood, but something countable in a hard (sort of) wood, and in the fields and woods. The problem may be stated in a long series of rules and exceptions, but in this book cases are marked specifically Countable or Uncountable, often with explanations, and generally with examples.

2. Verb-Patterns. Another of the fundamental difficulties encountered by the foreign student of English is the nature of the "pattern" or "patterns" in which a verb occurs. We see people, meet people, etc., but we do not wait people or look people; for wait and look are not of the same pattern as see, meet or miss. We ask, tell, like, expect, want or mean somebody to come, but we do not think, say, doubt or hope somebody to come. We think, believe, expect or hope that somebody will do something, but we do not want, like, prefer or force that somebody will do something. We give, lend, send or sell people things, but we do not explain or say people things. Thus we find that there are at least 27 ways in which a verb may be used in a sentence: 27 verb-patterns, 27 possibilities of putting the right verb (and the right form of it) into a wrong construction. In this book many notes are given showing into which pattern or patterns various verbs may enter. So far as we know, such information is given in no other reference book or textbook.

3. Adverbial Particles. To the student of English as a foreign language there is much difficulty in finding the right place and function of adverbs like in, out, away, back, up, down, on, off, and some of these are frequently confused with prepositions. We can take our hat off or take off our hat, but we do not take off it. We ring our friend up or ring up our friend, but we do not (as many students say or write) ring up him, although a fly may crawl up him. Grammarbooks written for English children naturally give little or no space to explanations of these problems (which are no problems for the English child), and in most grammars and textbooks written for foreign students little help is given in overcoming difficulties of this type. In this book full explanation and exemplification is given of

these puzzling words.

4. The "Anomalous Finites." The 24 finite-forms of anomalous verbs (am, is, are, was, were, have, has, had, do, does, did, shall. should, will, would, can, could, may, might, must, ought, need, dare and used) occur (actually or potentially) in every English sentence. They are the despair of the student of English in the earlier (and even later) stages. He is not allowed to say I come not or You come not, but he must say I am not or I must not. Come you or want you are forms that he is forbidden to use, but he is allowed (and obliged) to say can you or need you. Isn't it, don't you and couldn't he are approved, but wantn't you or gon't you are forbidden. To give the student rules about "auxiliary verbs" (and these are not "verbs" and most of them are not "auxiliary") is of little help to him, nor is it of any help to give him the old (and incidentally untrue) rule that " negative and interrogative sentences are conjugated with the verb to do." In this book each of these 24 words is set out in full, with its uses and peculiarities exemplified by clear and adequate examples.

# IV. How the Vocabulary is Set Out CAPTION WORDS

"Caption Words," or words representing the head of a word-group, are printed in bold type capitals, thus VARY—VARIOUS—VARIETY are not in themselves either verb, noun, adjective, adverb, or other part of speech, but the paragraph-heading—the label on the container. Under this heading are arranged the several members of the word group: vary, varied, varying, various, variously, varia-

tion, variety, variable, invariable.

When two caption words are spelt and pronounced in the same way but differ so considerably in meaning and use that they may conveniently be looked upon as two "different" words, they are presented as two separate caption words and numbered (1) (2) respectively, thus MIND (1) covers, e.g. body and mind, while MIND (2) covers, e.g. mind the children. Again PRESENT (1) includes make a present (gift), while PRESENT (2) includes the present moment.

#### WORKING UNITS

The word considered not as a caption word (or paragraph-heading) but as a "working unit" with its specific grammatical function (noun, verb, etc.) is printed in bold type, followed by its pronunciation (in phonetic symbols enclosed between square brackets) and the indication of its part of speech. Thus under the caption word YESTERDAY, we find:

yesterday ['jestedi], adv.

# INFLECTED FORMS

The plural of nouns, the inflected comparative and superlative of adjectives, and the parts of the verb are shown throughout, thus under the respective caption words BOOK, LONG and WAIT are found:

book [buk], books [buks], \*.
long [lon], longer ['longa], longest ['longist], adj.
wait [weit], waits [weits], waited ['weitid], waiting ['weitin], v.

When the preterite and the past participle have the same form, one entry only is made for the two.

Irregular inflected forms are shown in bold type, thus:

take [teik], takes [teiks], took [tuk], taken [teikn], taking ['teikin], v. child [tfaild], children ['tfildren], n.

#### GRAMMATICAL FUNCTIONS

When the word under consideration has more than one grammatical function (e.g. can act as both verb and noun, preposition and

adverb, adjective and adverb, etc.), each of its functions is set out in a separate paragraph preceded by the Roman Numerals I, II, III. Thus, under the caption-word ANSWER we find:

I. answer ['a:nsə], answers ['a:nsəz], answered ['a:nsad], answering

['amsərin], v. II. answer(s) ['amsə(z)], n.

Thus also under the caption word SINCE we find:

I. since [sins], adv.
II. since [sins], prep.
III. since [sins], conn.

The change of grammatical function more often than not is accompanied by a change of form, thus.

I. serve. II. service. III. servant.

When the derived word is considered to be more useful or frequent than the word from which it is derived it is put first. Thus, e.g., dirty and foolish precede respectively dirt and fool.

#### REGULAR DERIVATIVES

When, however, the change of grammatical form is made by means of such regular affixes or prefixes as -ly (happy-happily), -ness (happy-happiness), -er (sing-singer), un- (happy-unhappy), etc., in short, when the meaning and function of the derivative word may easily be deduced, or otherwise is hardly worth an entry under I, II, III, etc., the derivative is marked by the conventional sign \( \Delta \) Thus:

happy ['hæpi], happier ['hæpiə], happiest ['hæpiist], adj.

^ happiness ['hæpinis], n.

^ unhappy [An'hæpi], adj.

^ unhappiness [An'hæpinis], n.

Thus also:

read [ri:d], reads [ri:dz], read [red], reading ['ri:din], v. △ reader(s) ['ri:də(z)], n.

#### DEFINITIONS

When the word is without semantic varieties (or shifts of meaning) no definition is usually given, it being assumed that the sense is made sufficiently clear by the examples (or the examples of the word from which it is derived).

When, however, there are one or more shifts of meaning (under 1, 2, 3 . . . ), a definition, paraphrase or other clue to the meaning is given. These are intended for the use of the teacher or for the student whose recognition vocabulary is already fairly extensive, for in many cases the definition or paraphrase contains words much

rarer than the word to be defined. This is, of course, inevitable in a book of this nature, in which the vehicular language is the language

being taught.

For the sake of simplicity, however, two procedures are used which are not in the nature of definition or paraphrase. The first is the one in which the definition of the word contains the word itself, and the second is the simple mention "as in the following examples."

#### SEMANTIC VARIETIES

When the word under consideration has more than one "meaning" (or "stretch of meaning"), each of these is set out in a separate paragraph preceded by the Arabic Numerals 1, 2, 3 .... together with a paraphrase, definition or other indication of its meaning. Thus the entry

I. low [lou], lower ['loue], lowest ['louist], adj., is followed by

1. = not high.

2. = less than normal height.
 3. = not loud.

4. Of social position.

Thus also the entry

make [meik], makes [meiks], made [meid], making ['meikin], v., is followed by

1. = create, cause to exist, construct, produce, form, prepare, with figurative uses.

2. = cause to become [be].

3. = force or persuade. 4. = be counted as.

5. = come to be, result in being.

#### COLLOCATIONS

When a word forms an important element of a "collocation" (a succession of two or more words that may best be learnt as if it were a single word) the collocation is shown in bold type and preceded by the conventional sign ¶. In many cases the pronunciation of the collocation and an indication of its part of speech is also given, as well as, occasionally, an indication of its meaning. Thus under last will be found

¶ at last [ət 'last], adv. = in the end, after a long delay.

The collocations are entered so far as possible under the appropriate semantic variety of the word, thus I make up is entered under

1. = create, cause to exist, construct, produce, form, prepare;

whereas I make a fool of is entered under

2. = cause to become.

When, however, the meaning of the word in the collocation (or group of collocations) differs considerably from any of the meanings listed under 1, 2, 3, etc., an independent paragraph is provided.

Thus do, I. 2 is entitled "With certain particular nouns, adjectives, etc.," and contains such entries as do one's best, do business with. do good, do good to, do better, do right, do one's duty, do harm, etc. Thus also fall, I. 2 is entitled "With adverbial particles, etc., various meanings," and contains such entries as fall back, fall behind, fall through, fall in with, etc.

In a few cases the word in the collocation is treated as a semantic

variety, thus under ask we find

1. ¶ ask about.
2. ¶ ask for.

For the sake of conciseness two or more collocations are occasionally printed in one line, in which case the sign ¶¶ is used, thus

¶¶ a good [great] many.

#### PHRASES

Phrases are distinguished from collocations. While collocations are comparable in meaning and function to ordinary single "words" (and indeed are often translated by single words in the student's mother-tongue), phrases are more in the nature of conversational formulas, sayings, proverbs, etc. In this book phrases are marked Phr., and are printed sometimes in bold type and sometimes in ordinary type. Thus under do we find

Phr. How do you do?

#### CONSTRUCTION-PATTERNS

Such entries as

take sg. or sy. in [out, away, back, up, down, etc.], I don't know [Tell me, etc.] what to do [say, take, ask for, etc.], Tleave word [a message] (with sy.) (for sy.),

where the square brackets enclose alternatives and the round brackets optional omissions, show in a concise way the "constructionpatterns" (or models for sentence-building), and replace much explanatory matter and terminology.

It will be noted that PATTERNS are distinguished from EXAMPLES

by not starting with a CAPITAL letter.

#### VERB-PATTERNS

In Appendix I (pp. 276-283) will be found duly listed under 27 groups the most important English "Verb-Patterns." Thus verbs that make complete sense without any object or other adjunct will be found listed under *Verb-Pattern* 1. Verbs that may be used with a direct object are listed under Verb-Pattern 4; those that may be followed by to and an infinitive are listed under Verb-Pattern 15, and so on. In the body of the book will be found such concise entries as (under, e.g. ask):

Task for. See V.P. 5.
ask for money [information, Mrs. Smith, etc.]
He asked to go [to be excused, etc.]. See V.P. 15.
ask sy. to do sg. See V.P. 17.
Ask him to come in [do it, write to me, etc.].

#### ALTERNATIVE WORDS

The device of the square brackets is used not only in connection with the pronunciation of the word and to mark construction-patterns, but also to indicate alternative words. Thus the entry (under whenever),

Whenever [When] I do that, I get into trouble shows that the word whenever may be replaced in this context by when.

#### TDIOMS

In this book no need has been found for the term *idiom*. What are usually called "idioms" are generally nothing other than (a) collocations, (b) phrases and sayings, (c) rarer semantic varieties of words and collocations, (id) peculiar construction patterns and, in short, any word or form of wording that is likely to puzzle a foreign student.

#### Acknowledgements.

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First to Professor A. S. Hornby, who collaborated to a considerable extent in its general design, and made large contributions to its stock of examples, particularly those relating to the "uncountable nouns."

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with the treatment of certain entries.

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# **PRONUNCIATION**

# KEY WORDS FOR PHONETIC SYMBOLS

	Vowels				Diph	thongs
ir	see		*,	5	ei	day
i	it				ou	go
e	get				ai -	fly
æ	cat				au	how
a:	father				oi	boy
Э	hot				iə	here
o:	saw		11 000		63	there
u	put				<b>59</b>	four
u:	too				uə	tour
Λ	WP.					
9:	hurt					147
a	china, cath	nedral				

# CONSONANTS

q	ŋ	θ	ð	ſ	3	j	tſ	dz
give	long	thin	then	skip	measure	yes	<i>ch</i> in	jam

# NOTES

Stress is shown by the sign ' placed before syllables which are ongly stressed.

Symbols printed in italics represent sounds which may be strongly stressed.

omitted in speech.

# TERMS, SIGNS, AND ABBREVIATIONS

adj. subs.
adv.
adv. of deg.
adv. of time
adv. of place and position
adv. part.
aff.
anom. fin.
anom. v.
append.
bookish

capital letters caption words Cf. Collocation colloquial

adi.

comparative
comp.
comp. prep.
conj.
conjunctive
conn.
construction pattern
countable, uncountable
def. art.

det.
det. pron.
examples
fig.
finites
gerund
indef. art.

infin.
interj.
interr.
intrans.
mid-position adverbs
neg.
n.

adjective adjective-substitute adverb adverb of degree See p. 292

adverbial particle. See pp. vii, 290, 291
affirmative
anomalous finite See pp. vii, 284-286
anomalous verb. See pp. vii, 284-286
appendix
words or expressions not used in everyday speech or writing
see p. xi
see p. viii
compare
see pp. iv, x
words or expressions used only in
familiar speech or writing

compound word
compound preposition
conjunction. See p. 293
see p. 293
connective. See p. 293
see pp. xi, 276-283
see pp. xi
definite article=variety of determinative.
See pp. 286, 287
determinative. See pp. 286, 287
determinative pronoun
see p. xi
figurative use
see pp. vii, 284-286

indefinite article=variety of determinative. Sec pp. 286-287 infinitive interjection interrogative intransitive see pp. 291, 292 negative noun

noun-substitute n. subs. participial adjective part. adj. see p. 290 particle past participle past ppl. see pp. xi, xii patterns pers. pron. personal pronoun pers. pron. object. pers. pron. subject. phrase. See p. xi Phr. plural determinative pl. det. plural noun pl. n. possessive predicative adjective pred. adj. preposition. See p. 292 prep. prep. coll. preposition collocation. present tense pres. t. preterite pret. pron. pronoun words or expressions rarely used in speech rare or writing rel, adv. relative adverb rel. pron. relative pronoun semantic variety see p. xsing. singular something sg. somebody SY. superlative uncountable, countable see p. vi United States of America U.S.A.verb verbal noun verbal n. Verb Pattern. see pp. wii, xi, 276-283 V.P.see p. 276 X regular derivatives of caption words. Δ See p. ix Collocation. See p. x Pronunciation Construction patterns. See p. xi Alternative words or expressions. See pp. xi, xii Usual uses and optional omissions. See p. xi Roman numerals (I, etc.) Functional varieties of caption words. See pp. viii-ix Semantic varieties of caption words. Arabic numerals (1, etc.)

See p. x

# SUMMARY OF 27 VERB PATTERNS.

(See pp. 276-283.)

V.P. 1. Verb  $\times$  0

- 2. Verb × Subject Complement
- 3. Verb × Adverbial Complement

4. Verb × Direct Object

- 5. Verb × Preposition × Prepositional Object
- 6. Verb × Direct Object × Adverbial Complement
- 7. Verb × Direct Object × Adjective
- 8. Verb × Direct Object × (to be) × Adjective 9. Verb × Direct Object × Object Complement
- 10. Verb × Direct Object × Prep. × Prep. Obj. (3 groups)
- 11. Verb × Indirect Object × Direct Object (2 groups)
- 12. Verb × (for ×) Comp. of Distance, Duration, Price, Weight (4 groups)

13. Verb × Infinitive

- 14. Verb × Direct Object × Infinitive
- 15. Verb × " to " × Infinitive
- 16. Verb × "how to " × Infinitive
- 17. Verb × Direct Object × "to" × Infinitive
- 18. Verb  $\times$  Direct Object  $\times$  "how to"  $\times$  Infinitive
- 19. Verb × Gerund
- 20. Verb × Direct Object × Gerund
- 21. Verb × Direct Object × Past Participle
- 22. Verb  $\times$  (that)  $\times$  Clause
- 23. Verb  $\times$  Direct Object  $\times$  (that)  $\times$  Clause
- 24. Verb × " so "
- 25. Verb × " not "
- 26. Verb × (Direct Object) × Conjunctive and Clause
- 27. Verb × "as if " × Clause