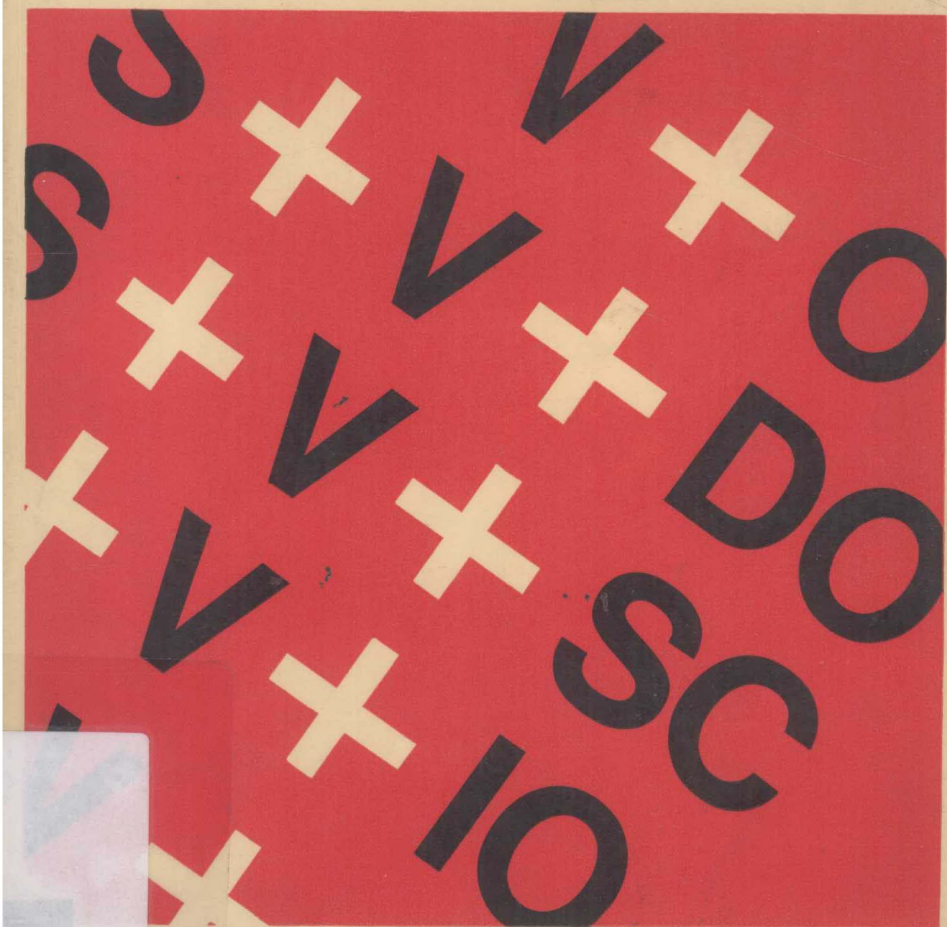


A GRAMMAR OF MODERN ENGLISH

W. H. MITTINS



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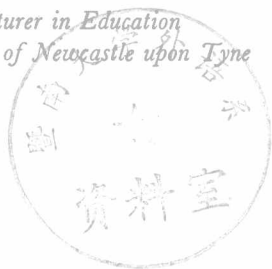
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外文书库

A Grammar of Modern English

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FOREWORD

FEW teachers of English as a first language would favour the reinstatement of traditional Latinate grammar in the central position it used to occupy in English studies. But a growing number seem to be convinced of the need for a new kind of grammar, oriented towards the language of today as used by responsible speakers and writers. These teachers are handicapped by the lack of textbooks which, in the words of James Sledd, are 'linguistically respectable and pedagogically usable'. Sledd and one or two other Americans have in fact produced textbooks for schools and colleges in the U.S.A. It seems timely to attempt something of the kind in Britain.

A fully 'respectable' teaching-grammar cannot be expected until a complete description of English usage is provided. Professor Randolph Quirk and a London University team are engaged upon such a description, but have years of work yet to do. Meanwhile, those who believe that language-study has an important contribution to make to the teaching of English need interim textbooks incorporating such linguistic findings as are available and relevant.

This book tries to meet that need. It assumes that a realistic study of the grammatical structures of modern English can help users of the language to communicate in it more effectively, more precisely, and more resourcefully than they otherwise might. If, as seems demonstrable, the poor quality of much English speech and writing derives from looseness in verbal construction and reliance upon a

very restricted range of constructions, a systematic examination of the nature and range of verbal patterns might conceivably foster both firmness and resourcefulness in the matching of words to meanings. It is hoped, too, that the emphasis in the later sections on choosing among alternative structures (i.e. stylistics) will help towards the integration of grammar with matters of composition and literature.

There is probably as much difference of opinion about the timing as about other aspects of a grammar course. I have aimed primarily at the upper forms of grammar schools. It is idle to pretend that English grammar is an easy subject, but there should be little in the book beyond the grasp of the average G.C.E. Ordinary Level candidate. Nevertheless, some teachers might prefer to wait until the Sixth Form stage.

One of the main differences from conventional school grammars is the accordance of priority to speech patterns. The primacy of the spoken language is being increasingly recognized, and it is hoped that the elementary analysis of features of intonation in the early chapters will illuminate important distinctions between speech and writing and will provide a frame of reference for much of the later grammatical discussion.

Nomenclature remains a peculiarly intractable problem. There seems as little uniformity of usage among new as among traditional grammarians. The most blurred of traditional terms (e.g. Noun, Adjective) and the most technical of modern linguistic terms (e.g. morpheme, immediate constituent) have been avoided. Many more or less satisfactory conventional terms (e.g. Verb, Complement) have been retained. Some familiar labels have been slightly modified (e.g. Adverbial). And a few comparative novelties (e.g. Adnominal, Verbid) have been adopted.

The total compromise, if not agreeable, ought at least to prove workable.

'Learning by doing' seems specially appropriate to native language work. This manual is therefore primarily a practical work-book. The comments are kept as short as possible, to encourage concentration on the scrutiny of samples and the working of exercises. The risk of presenting occasional examples of unsatisfactory usage† is deliberately taken where this seems to be the most effective way of making a point. The frequent recourse to newspaper headlines may be thought even more risky, but headlines have two marked advantages. First, by reducing patterns to the barest minimum, they draw attention to basic structures in a most stark way. Secondly, they constitute a rich source of manageable linguistic material readily available to all students and operating (unlike many textbook exemplars) in a real-life context.

W. H. M.

† Where these occur as 'samples' they are marked with an asterisk *

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Part One

MEANING IN SPEECH AND WRITING

I · Meaning and Context

SAMPLE

- A] LIFT (Noticeboard alongside elevator shaft)
‘Lift!’ shouted the foreman to the gang erecting the telegraph pole.
- B] STEP INSIDE
‘Step inside,’ invited a pleasant voice.
- c] Mrs Gregory was indoors *dusting* the piano, while her husband was in the garden *dusting* the cabbages with insecticide.

COMMENT

- A] A word on its own is not meaningful; what it means depends on its context. A word’s context includes the words around it, the users of the words (speaker and listener, or writer and reader), the place, the state of affairs, and so on. Thus ‘lift’ can, according to circumstances, mean ‘Here is the elevator’ or ‘Raise it off the ground!’
- B] Similarly ‘step inside’ might be a warning to beware of the step or an invitation to come in. Only a fuller context can clear up this ambiguity.
- c] Here context and our knowledge of ordinary human

behaviour lead us without hesitation to accept the first 'dusting' in the sense of *removing* dust, the second in the contrary sense of *adding* dust.

EXERCISES

1. Suggest for each of the following words two contexts which would give it quite different meanings:

Fire	Press	Up	Out	Off
Halt	Cricket	Home	Private	Players

2. Do the same for the following word-groups:

long sentence	(composition/crime)
last post	(mail/military funeral)
He needed a long rest	(convalescence/billiards)
Take One	(free leaflet/filming)
Indian Braves Fire	(newspaper headline)

3.

COAL STRIKE IN SCOTLAND
OIL STRIKE IN TEXAS

In these two headlines 'strike' has two very different meanings. What circumstances suggest one meaning in the first case, another in the second?

2 · *Clusters*

SAMPLE

- A] Lunch lasted hours.
 The midday meal went on for a long time.

He *is proposing* to retire soon. (intends)
 There was no tree *to be seen* for miles. (visible)

A sailor *with a wooden leg* was singing noisily. (wooden-legged)

Few people are *able to use both hands equally well*. (ambidextrous)

You need shoes *that will keep out water*. (waterproof)

- B] He was writing the story of his life.

He wrote autobiography.
(able) to use both hands equally well

- C] (the) fat policeman's wife (the) fat policeman's wife

- D] three times seven plus two:

$$3 \times (7 + 2) = 27 \quad \text{or} \quad (3 \times 7) + 2 = 23$$

COMMENT

- A] Most sentences other than the very simplest contain at least one group of words which belong more closely to one another than to other words in the sentence. Such word-groups, which are often more or less equivalent in meaning to single words, may be called *Clusters*.
- B] In sizeable sentences containing a number of clusters some clusters belong more closely to each other than to other clusters. In such cases the ranking can be shown by a kind of inverted family tree.
- C] Sometimes in writing (though not in speech – see Sections 3–5) the ranking is not clear and two meanings are possible.
- D] In mathematics a similar ambiguity is avoided by the use of brackets.

EXERCISES

1. Suggest single words more or less equivalent in meaning to the clusters italicized in:
 - a) She *made up her mind* to enter the contest.
 - b) *Little by little* the chest sank in the mud.
 - c) It was an experience *to be remembered*.
 - d) All their efforts were *to no purpose*.
 - e) Much of what the speaker said was *off the point*.
 - f) A dog *that was apparently fierce of disposition* was guarding the gate.
 - g) His parents had *left the country in order to live overseas*.
 - h) He *said that* the accusation *was untrue*.
 - i) Her essay was full of *sentences taken from books*.
 - j) It was a situation *we could not put up with*.
2. Treat the following sentences in the same way as in Sample B above. That is, first indicate the smallest clusters by bracketing; then bracket together the clusters progressively.
 - a) The city's new Lord Mayor is threatening to resign immediately.
 - b) Few people are able to possess everything they want.
 - c) The travellers' passports were returned to them.
 - d) Several thousand public transport employees suddenly went on unofficial strike.
 - e) The result of the election ought to have been declared at midnight.
3. Make up pairs of sentences to illustrate the pairs of possible meanings of:
 - a) the former minister's residence
 - b) the daughter of the president's son
 - c) new members' lounge
 - d) more difficult problems
 - e) a single woman's job

3 · *Speech Patterns – Transition*

SAMPLE

- A] The engine won't start ↘ I'll have to investigate ↘
Perhaps we have run out of petrol ↘ That's what
happened last time ↘
How stupid of you ↘ You really ought to know
better ↘
- B] Won't the engine start ↗ You'll have to investigate ↘
Have we run out of petrol ↗ That's what happened
last time ↘
The engine won't start ↗ What a nuisance ↘
- C] The engine won't start → but we've plenty of petrol ↘
How stupid of you → you careless dolt ↘
Nobody noticed the number of the car which had been
stolen ↘
Nobody noticed the number of the car → which had
been stolen ↘
- D] Shall I + scream for ice + cream ↗
Fancy bringing a briefcase for such a brief + case ↘

COMMENT

(NOTE: The analysis of speech patterns is a comparatively new study. Experts are by no means agreed on what distinctions can properly be made and on how they may best be shown in writing. In any case, speakers vary in their speech habits. This and the following two sections are intended only as rough guides to one way of treating this important matter.)

Transition is the process of passing from one item (syllable, word, word-group, sentence) to another. Four kinds of

'break' or 'holding-on' seem to be distinguishable. The first three (A, B, C) are usually called *terminals*, because they come at the end of segments of speech. The fourth (D) is known variously as *open transition* or *plus juncture*.

- A] The falling terminal ↘ characteristically marks the end of a statement or command or exclamation, and often follows a fall in the pitch or level of the voice. It represents a fading away into silence. It commonly coincides with (in writing) the full-stop, semi-colon, or exclamation mark.
- B] The rising terminal ↗ characteristically marks the end of a question and often follows a rise in the pitch of the voice. Note, however, that this is not the only way of marking a question; where a question-word (who? how? where? etc.) is used, a question commonly follows the same pattern as the statement: e.g. Who was that ↘.
- C] The level terminal → characteristically separates two segments but without any change of pitch. It often corresponds to the written comma. Like it, it can, for instance, mark the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses, as in the two renderings of the 'Nobody noticed . . .' sentence. (See also Section 40 below.)
- D] Plus juncture normally (though by no means invariably) coincides with the division between words.

EXERCISES

1. Read aloud the sentences in the Sample above, observing the terminals and plus junctures marked.
2. Write out a short telephone conversation. Mark the important terminal junctures.
3. Copy out the following sentences. Read each one aloud.

Then underline the pair of contrasted items in it, and put in the important plus junctures.

- a) Blackbirds are not the only kind of black birds.
- b) A glasshouse is not really a glass house.
- c) The loudspeaker need not have been used by such a loud speaker.
- d) I see Mabel, but I don't seem able to attract her attention.
- e) They freed Annie willingly, but they refused to free Danny.
- f) He was in need of a rest and therefore welcomed his arrest.
- g) If you show me the market, I'll mark it on my map.
- h) He shot an arrow through a narrow crack in the wall.
- i) Just leave me that sample; that's ample.
- j) The poster urged the public to post early for Christmas.

4 · *Speech Patterns—Stress*

SAMPLE

- A] lighthousekeeper
télégraph pole
meat-paste sandwich
briefcase a brief case briefly
German student German student
- B] 1st speaker: How are you?
2nd speaker: Well, thank you. How are you?
- C] Professor Rakes → Leaves ↘
Professor → Rakes Leaves ↘
When eating fish → always use a fish-knife ↘