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OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

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OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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ESSENTIALS
OF
ENGLISH GRAMMAR

BY
OTTO JESPERSEN

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PREFACE

THE appearance of this book is due to urgent appeals from some English friends (among them Professors W. E. Collinson, G. C. Moore Smith, and R. A. Williams), who asked me to bring out a one-volume grammar embodying the principles explained in *The Philosophy of Grammar* and partly carried out in the four volumes of my *Modern English Grammar*. After some years of hesitation I have now made the attempt, but of course the responsibility for its shortcomings rests exclusively upon me. Parts of the manuscript have been submitted to various friends, to whose kind criticisms I owe a great debt of gratitude. I must mention Dr E. R. Edwards, who read nearly the whole of the manuscript; Professors C. A. Bodelsen and G. E. K. Braunholtz, Miss Isabel Fry, Dr G. E. Fuhrken, and Miss J. Young, Ph.D., who all of them read a greater or lesser number of chapters and communicated to me their remarks. Niels Haislund, M.A., assisted me in copying the manuscript, and gave me valuable assistance in reading the proofs. My heartfelt thanks to all these kind scholars!

To the student I may perhaps offer two pieces of advice: to read in general the examples before the rules, and, if he is not particularly interested in phonetics, to skip Chapters II-VI until he has finished the rest of the book.

I may be allowed here to repeat what I wrote in 1909 in the first volume of my bigger Grammar:

"It has been my endeavour in this work to represent English Grammar not as a set of stiff dogmatic precepts, according to which some things are correct and others absolutely wrong, but as something living and developing under continual fluctuations and undulations, something that is founded on the past and prepares the way for the future, something that is not always consistent or perfect, but progressing and perfectible—in one word, human."

A detailed exposition of the reasons that have led me to

deviate from much of what is usually found in English grammars, and some criticism of the views of other scholars, will be found in a paper on "The System of Grammar," which will be printed in a volume, "Linguistica: Selected Papers in English, French, and German," and will also be sold separately.¹

OTTO JESPERSEN

GENTOFTE, COPENHAGEN

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¹ London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

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ESSENTIALS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTORY

What is grammar?—Local and social dialects.—Spoken and written language.—Formulas and free expressions.—Expression, suppression, and impression.—Prescriptive, descriptive, explanatory, historical, appreciative grammar.—Purpose and plan of this grammar.

1.1. Grammar deals with the structure of languages, English grammar with the structure of English, French grammar with the structure of French, etc. Language consists of words, but the way in which these words are modified and joined together to express thoughts and feelings differs from one language to another.

English and French have many words in common but treat them in a totally different way. Take the word *excuse*, which is spelt in the same way in the two languages. But the pronunciation is different, the vowel in the last syllable of the French word being unknown in English. In English we make a difference in pronunciation between *to excuse* and *an excuse*, but no such difference is made in French. Still greater differences appear when we make up complete sentences. Compare, for instance, the following :

Excuse me.	Excusez-moi.
Don't excuse me.	Ne m'excusez pas.
Do you excuse her?	L'excusez-vous? or Est-ce que vous l'excusez?
We excuse her.	Nous l'excusons.
Let us excuse her.	Excusons-la.
We must excuse her.	Il faut l'excuser.
We shall excuse her.	Nous l'excuserons.
Shall we excuse her?	Est-ce que nous l'excuserons? etc., etc.

1.2. The grammar of each language constitutes a system of its own, each element of which stands in a certain relation to,

and is more or less dependent on, all the others. No linguistic system, however, is either completely rigid or perfectly harmonious, and we shall see in some of the subsequent chapters that there are loopholes and deficiencies in the English grammatical system.

Language is nothing but a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings, and especially to impart them to others. As with other habits it is not to be expected that they should be perfectly consistent. No one can speak exactly as everybody else or speak exactly in the same way under all circumstances and at all moments, hence a good deal of vacillation here and there. The divergencies would certainly be greater if it were not for the fact that {the chief purpose of language is to make oneself understood by other members of the same community;} this presupposes and brings about a more or less complete agreement on all essential points. The closer and more intimate the social life of a community is, the greater will be the concordance in speech between its members. In old times, when communication between various parts of the country was not easy and when the population was, on the whole, very stationary, a great many local dialects arose which differed very considerably from one another; the divergencies naturally became greater among the uneducated than among the educated and richer classes, as the latter moved more about and had more intercourse with people from other parts of the country. In recent times the enormously increased facilities of communication have to a great extent counteracted the tendency towards the splitting up of the language into dialects—class dialects and local dialects. (In this grammar we must in many places call attention to various types of divergencies: geographical (English in the strictest sense with various sub-divisions, Scottish, Irish, American), and social (educated, colloquial, literary, poetical, on the one hand, and vulgar on the other).) But it should be remembered that these strata cannot be strictly separated from, but are constantly influencing one another. (Our chief concern will be with the normal speech of the educated class, what may be called Standard English,) but we must remember that the speech even