

A FUNCTIONAL

*English  
Grammar*

BY

MARGARET M. BRYANT

BROOKLYN COLLEGE



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## Preface

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THIS textbook is intended for classroom use in connection with the growing number of courses in grammar which are being offered in universities and colleges. It is assumed that students have studied some elementary grammar, so that such terms as *noun* and *subject* are familiar to them. The thirty-two chapters, divided into two parts, one dealing with accidence and one with syntax, will provide ample material for any class. Each chapter is well supplied with exercises so as to give the student adequate drill and make him aware of the changes that take place in the language he uses every day.

As will be indicated in Chapter I, the attempt is here made to draw as clear a line as possible between the science of the English language, which is to say its grammar, and the art of the English language, which is commonly taught under the terms rhetoric, composition, and English. This important distinction is frequently blurred, so that one finds matters of grammar figuring in books on rhetoric, and vice versa. It is in deference to such a distinction that I have omitted from the present volume technical instruction on the organization and presentation of written material.

A second distinction which has had to be observed in the writing of this book has been even more difficult. While attempting to present the grammar of Modern English against its historical background, which is the only method leading to adequate comprehension, I have attempted to exclude instruction properly belonging to a textbook on the history of the English language. Many treatises in fact mix together grammar, rhetoric, and linguistic history after a fashion which cannot but be confusing and unsettling to the student enrolled for a course bearing the name of just one of these three subjects.

How to do justice to the indispensable historical aspect of

English grammar and still avoid overlapping with material on the history of English has been a hard problem, and one which perhaps I have not entirely solved. I have refrained from including any account of the social history of the English language and the changes which the centuries have seen in inflections and syntactical constructions. I have introduced the English of past periods only as a means of enlarging and enriching the student's comprehension of the English spoken today. A future projected volume on the history of English will, if it is completed, attempt to fill in the remainder of the historical picture of the language we speak.

A word should be said concerning the student of grammar who is working by himself rather than in a class. To such a student, whether stenographer, secretary, civil servant, businessman, or any other representative of our vast army of the employed, or foreigner wishing to learn the English language, this textbook will offer ample and rewarding mental exercise. If the student wishes to start a linguistic library, the books mentioned in the text will be found excellent fare; or he may confine himself to this volume without missing any of the essentials of the subject. Somewhat of a handicap may be the lack of a competent authority to review and correct his exercises in grammatical analysis. But if he has mastered the text thoroughly, these exercises should give him no great difficulty. If special problems arise, a sympathetic welcome and ready aid will almost certainly be extended by the teacher of high school or college English nearest at hand if the student will make the effort to search out this potential guide.

It is to be hoped that this text will give the student some understanding of the language he uses, some knowledge of its development as well as of its use in the present day. The approach is both synthetic and analytic with the idea of making the student acquainted with the patterns of English structure. That is, the student not only analyzes sentences but employs specific patterns and forms in sentences that he constructs. Written English has been stressed, but it is understood that spoken English is of primary importance. The difference in the two may easily be brought out in oral discussion so that the student will realize the significance of his learning certain struc-

tures for his writing and understand that other forms and structures may occur in spoken English. The author will be happy if the material presented here helps in any way to give the student a clearer insight into the ways of the English language. The new developments in linguistic science will, no doubt, lead us to better methods in the future.

The author is chiefly indebted for help in the preparation of this volume to those students in grammar whom she has had the opportunity and pleasure of teaching in various parts of the country, but particularly in Brooklyn College, and to stimulating grammatical discussions with her friends and colleagues, especially the late Dr. Janet Rankin Aiken. She is also grateful to Miss Constance Knight and Mrs. Georganna McLarty Voigt for many helpful suggestions in the preparation of the manuscript, to Mr. Alexander N. Sloan, who carefully read the manuscript, and to the staff of D. C. Heath and Company, who helped in preparing the manuscript for the press.

M. M. B.

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# Introduction







## Definition of Terms

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**1. Grammar.** Basically, the study of English grammar consists in bringing conscious thought and analysis to bear upon everyday language. Any person of normal intelligence can and does constantly frame sounds, words, and sentences which he is totally unable to describe or to explain scientifically. Every waking hour of life people are busy reading, hearing, and understanding messages of whose nature and structure they are unaware. It is this familiar everyday material which grammar lifts from the unconscious to the conscious level of thought and studies systematically.

The English language, or any language, may be studied as an art. Such study is aimed at mastering the instrument of language as the violinist or the sculptor masters his musical instrument, for the purpose of artistic communication. The many and varied aspects of English as an art have various names, among them composition, rhetoric, creative writing, **prosody**, **poetics**, elocution, and public speaking. None of these subjects belongs properly under the head of grammar.

If we exclude consideration of the English language as an art, we are left with English as a science calling for orderly analysis such as any scientist applies to his subject.

*Grammar is the scientific analysis of communication in words.*

**2. The Sentence.** The term *sentence*, which must next be defined, covers more or less ground according to the meaning given to it. It is often defined by grammarians as being any complete and independent communication. On this basis the sentence is obviously universal, i.e., a feature of all languages. But in connection with most modern languages nearly every grammatical authority recognizes the necessity, in a sentence,

of a subject and a predicate. These are not universal grammatical concepts, being absent, for example, from Chinese. It is necessary, therefore, first to choose between the universal and the specific definition of *sentence*, and since the specific definition (applying to English but not to every language) seems to be preferred, we shall use that one.

*A sentence is a communication in words, conveying a sense of completeness and containing at least one independent verb with its subject.*

The terms *subject* and *verb* will be discussed in later paragraphs.

**3. The Nonsense.** If the sentence is to be defined narrowly, as above, it is necessary to find some name and classification for the many English communications which are not sentences. Such communications are exceedingly common — on windows, buildings, and billboards; on cards, letters, and envelopes; in conversation and even in formal writing. They have been variously called fragmentary, partial, and incomplete sentences, verbless sentences, and nonsentences. None of these terms is either accurate or adequate. The last is perhaps the best, although it is open to the objection of suggesting that the nonsense is derived from the sentence, whereas the reverse is undoubtedly the case. The sentence is derivative and the nonsense primary in the historical development of grammar.

*The nonsense is a communication in other than sentence form.*

**4. Parts of Speech.** The grammatical term *part of speech*, or *part*, has been in use in England for nearly a thousand years. The word *speech*, which entered the phrase about four centuries ago, is well chosen, since it stresses the oral character of language. The eightfold division of words into eight parts of speech, however, is open to criticism in that it is neither formal nor functional, but frequently arbitrary and lacking in logic. Still, its terms are convenient, and if they are supplemented by more accurate concepts the knowledge of them will do no harm to the student's perception of grammar.

The eight parts of speech, in the order of the definitions to be given here, are *verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection*. Of these, the verb stands alone; noun and pronoun fall together as *substantives*; adjective and adverb are grouped as *modifiers*; preposition and conjunction are both *connectives*; while the interjection is an independent element and constitutes one form of nonsentence.

### 5. The Verb.

*The verb is a word or phrase which expresses action or assertion regarding someone or something.*

*Grow* expresses action and is a verb in the sentence "Plants *grow*." In the imperative "*Work*," the action is expressed not as taking place, but as commanded or requested to take place concerning someone not named. In "If he *had worked*, he would have finished," the first verb, *had worked*, denotes an unperformed action. In "It *seems* a pity," the verb *seems* expresses not action but assertion. Assertion is most often expressed by some form of the verb *to be*.

**6. The Verbid.** Among verbs two groups or types of forms must be distinguished: *finite verbs*, illustrated in the preceding paragraph, and *verbid*s.<sup>1</sup>

*The verbid is a word or phrase doing the work of a verb but not conveying that sense of completeness necessary for making a sentence.*

Verbids are of two sorts: *-ing* and *-ed* forms on the one hand, and *to* forms on the other. They are illustrated by the first words in the sentences "*Reading* books is pleasant" and "*To read* books is pleasant." If the word *books* is omitted and the sentences become simply "*Reading* (or, *To read*) is pleasant," the verbid character of *reading* and *to read* is lost and these words become simply nouns, subjects of *is*. They no longer conform to the definition of the verb, which requires that action or assertion be expressed "regarding someone or something" (see § 5). In other words, the verbid requires a subject or a complement, or both, to be regarded as such.

<sup>1</sup> The reader will be more familiar with the term *verbal*. On the use of *verbid* in preference to *verbal*, see § 117.

## 7. The Noun.

*The noun is a naming word, answering the question Who? (Whom?) or What?*

In the sentence just given, "Reading is pleasant," the first word names an action and is therefore a noun. The difference between naming an action and expressing an action is seen by comparing this example with "*Reading books is pleasant*," where *reading* expresses action regarding *books* and is therefore a verb (of the verbid type). In this sentence the subject is *reading books*.

Other nouns are *door* in "Open the *door*," *chair* in "He sat on that *chair*," and *plants* in "*Plants* grow."

The noun may be a word, a phrase, or a clause. It is a clause in the sentence "*Whoever comes is welcome*," where *whoever comes* is a noun clause or clause noun.

**8. The Pronoun.** Certain very familiar words which also answer the questions *Who?* or *What?*, as well as other questions, are called *pronouns*. There are various subdivisions within the pronoun group, which contains rather a heterogeneous mixture. The main subdivisions are *personal*, *interrogative*, *relative*, *demonstrative*, and *indefinite pronouns*.

*Personal pronouns are I, you, and he and their related words.*

*Interrogative pronouns are who, which, and what in questions.*

*Relative pronouns are who, which, and what when they do not ask direct questions, and that.*

*Demonstrative pronouns are this, that, these, and those when used to point out and name something or someone.*

*Indefinite pronouns are a host of naming words, such as somebody, either, each, none, etc.*

Opinions differ whether or not the numerals are pronouns.

**9. The Adjective and the Adverb.** The English *modifier* is a word, a phrase, or a clause which is used to clarify or limit the meaning of some other part of a communication. Modifiers are of two sorts, *adjectives* and *adverbs*.

*Adjectives answer the questions Which? or What kind of? and are used mainly with substantives.*

*Adverbs answer a great variety of questions, including How? When? Where? and Why? and are used mainly with parts of speech other than substantives.*

Examples of adjectives are *that*, *cactus*, and *you* bought in "That *cactus* plant *you* bought will grow nicely in that pot if you give it sunshine."

In the same sentence, the words after the verb *will grow* are a word adverb (*nicely*), a phrase adverb (*in that pot*), and clause adverb (*if you give it sunshine*).

**10. The Preposition and the Conjunction.** The English *connective* is a word, a phrase, or (rarely) a clause which is used to join together sentence elements on the same or on different levels. To this joining function is usually added a meaning.

In "a book *about* Chaucer," the word *about* makes a connection between *book* and *Chaucer*. It also adds a meaning different from that which would be conveyed by *by*, which if used would do the same grammatical work. *About Chaucer* is a phrase adjective modifying *book*; hence the words connected, *book* and *Chaucer*, are on different levels. The word *about* is a *preposition*.

*The preposition is a connective normally followed by a substantive object which it relates to some other sentence element. The elements connected are on different levels.*

In "poor *but* honest" we find the connective *but* joining words on the same level. *But* is a *coordinating conjunction*.

*The coordinating conjunction joins two elements on the same level.*

In "He will not come *unless* we write to him," the connective *unless* joins the clause which follows to the rest of the sentence. *Unless* is a *subordinating conjunction*.

*The subordinating conjunction joins a clause to the rest of the sentence. The clause and the main sentence are on different levels.*

### 11. The Interjection.

*Interjections are nonsentence exclamations consisting of a word, a phrase, or (rarely) a clause, used to express strong emotion outside the sentence form.*

*Oh! Dear me! Oh, that it were otherwise!* are examples of interjections. Interjections are not very important grammatically.

**12. The Subject.** Within a sentence the first thing to identify is always the verb. When this has been done, ask the question *Who?* or *What?* before the verb, and the answer will be the subject.

*The subject is that element of the sentence which performs the action or initiates the assertion expressed by the verb.*

### 13. Predicate.

*All the sentence except the subject and its modifiers is predicate.*

To find the modifiers of the subject, ask *Which?* or *What kind of?* in connection with it. In the sentence "The boy who called is John," the subject *boy* with its modifiers *the* and *who called* is subtracted from the sentence to find the predicate, *is John*.

**14. The Object.** The object answers the question *Who?* *Whom?* or *What?* after a verb, verbid, or preposition.

*The direct object is that sentence element which undergoes the action or completes the assertion expressed by the verb.*

**15. Accidence.** The next seven chapters will be devoted to the study of English inflections, a study variously called *accidence* and *morphology*. *Morphology* is derived from the Greek *morpho-*, meaning "form." *Accidence* is derived from the Latin *accidere*, "to fall together," and refers to the merging of suffix with a word stem. It is immaterial whether the term *accidence* or *morphology* be used.

*Accidence (morphology) is the study of inflections in English speech and writing.*

## 16. Inflection.

*An inflection is always part of a word, and in the practice of Modern English is a suffix which is added to a word to show time, number, or some other grammatical coloring.*

## 17. Form Words.

*Form words, or morphemes, are those little empty words — auxiliaries and prepositions, for the most part — which do the same sort of work in communication that inflections do.*

For instance, the preposition *of* in “the work of a day” does the same sort of work as the inflectional *-s* in “a day’s work.” It is not correct to speak of inflections and morphemes interchangeably, however, as the two are not quite the same. In a broad sense, the study of accidence covers these form words as well as inflections, since form words are substitutes for inflections.

**18. Aspect.** Inflectional elements convey definite grammatical ideas and colorings.

*The term aspect will be used to denote the grammatical ideas and colorings which are indicated by inflection.*

The most obvious aspects which may be expressed by inflections are those of *number* and *time*. Number centers mainly in the noun and time (*tense*) mainly in the verb. Then come, in nouns and pronouns, the aspects of *gender*, *person*, and *case*, all of which are more important historically than currently. The adjective aspect is called *comparison*. The verb has, besides these, the very subtle and difficult aspects of *person*, *mood*, and *voice*.

The term *aspect* thus denotes the categories of morphology, i.e., classifications of inflections based on meaning. Application of the term may be illustrated by the sentence “Your books came.” As a possessive the first word falls under the category or aspect of *case*; the second has an inflectional ending, *-s*, which partakes of the aspect of *number*; while the



third shows by the vowel *a* that it is a fossil<sup>2</sup> inflected form falling under the aspect of time.

Altogether eight aspects will be studied — number, gender, case, person, comparison, voice, mood, time — plus an indefinite number of semi-aspects or incipient aspects which may or may not one day get themselves added to the list.

### FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Take any piece of ordinary writing from book, magazine, or newspaper and go through it paragraph by paragraph, first identifying sentences and nonsentences. Identify every word as one of the eight parts of speech described in this chapter, and then pick out the larger units, subjects, predicates, and objects. If you are puzzled or uncertain over some word or construction, do not try to solve it, but lay it aside to be reconsidered later.

<sup>2</sup> Inflections in Modern English take the form of suffixes. Inflections in Old English were often merely vowel changes within a word. Although it survives in many words, the change of vowel is not a present-day method of inflection and is best described as *fossil inflection*. The study of accidentence includes such vowel changes where they have survived.