

Elaboration of English Grammar

英语语法详论

Zhao Duanxiang
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赵端祥 代礼胜 罗明礼

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Preface

As is well known, the three linguistic aspects of English are its grammar, sounds and vocabulary, making it very clear that English grammar is of great importance to the English learners. Repeated teaching and studying practice has proved that at some stage students of English must learn the grammar of the language, practicing the use of grammatical structures and applying the various facets of grammatical rules in possible sentences so long as they make up their minds to widen their knowledge of the language. Studying a grammar does help them learn about a language — avoid common mistakes by showing them the principles which those mistakes transgress, and extend their command of various other constructions in order to improve their compulsory and broad knowledge of the language.

What grammar is needed in learning English?

An English grammar explained in English is badly needed by the English learners including those who specialize in English and those who are non-English majors but cherish a special interest in English.

Such a new book, *Elaboration of English Grammar*, has come out after a persistent and painstaking research into present-day English has been made by us for many years. It is a more substantive and thorough grammar which is designed to help college students of English and anyone interested in the English language master the skills and knowledge needed to use standard English as freely and effectively as the English-speaking people do. The explanation in English is readable and understandable provided that they have acquired a general grasp of the English-Chinese grammar glossary at the end of the book. Learning English grammatical knowledge from English will be sure to whet the appetite of the learners.

There are thirty-three chapters in this book. Each chapter is thoroughly subdivided so that only one rule or concept is presented at a time, and it is convenient for learners to study and apply it to practice. The book provides learners with a lot of sentences which contain examples in everyday life, literature, culture, education, politics, economy, society, history, geography, science, hi-tech and so on. Some examples are the very latest. The book includes topics ranging from

simple sentence structures to the more complex systematically, with emphasis on the main, important points, and problems related to the new concepts of current English. Most of the glossary, is commonly met with in grammars, and some of it may be new, with its meaning being easily inferred from the illustrative example immediately following.

Questions accompany each chapter. They generalize the gist of what the learners should learn and have learned from the chapter concerned.

It is not easy to describe the English grammatical rules as absolutely accurate insofar as all language that faithfully reflects the spirit of age changes over a period of time and there are so many different schools of linguistics and their books on the English grammar. Even so, what we have done is describe the current English language in detail by doing everything in our power. We hope that *Elaboration of English Grammar* will serve as a valuable tool for the English learners. Errors are to be avoided as far as possible. Criticisms or further discussions will be welcomed if any.

We are particularly indebted to Leshan Normal College and the College's Foreign Languages Department for supporting the publication of this book. We thank all our colleagues for their great concern and enthusiastic assistance. In addition, we would also like to express my gratitude to the authors whose books are listed in the bibliography.

Zhao Duanxiang
Dai Lisheng
Luo Mingli

May, 2005

Key to Symbols

e.g (e.g.):	for example
ie (i.e.):	that is
AE:	American English
BE:	British English
Cf:	confer
N.B. (NB):	note well
//:	slants enclosing phonetic transcriptions

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Introduction

I . Definition

What is grammar?

Grammar is defined by some grammarians as the study of how a language “works”, or a description of certain organizing aspects of a particular language, or a description of usages of educated speakers of the language, or the rules of a language.

These definitions explain clearly what a grammar means to a degree. In the widest sense of the term, grammar is a complex set of relations of language. However, grammar is traditionally concerned not just with the principles which determine the formation of words, phrases and sentences, but also with the principles which govern their interpretation — i.e. with the principles which tell us how to interpret (= assign meaning to) words, phrases and sentences. We might therefore characterize grammar as the study of the principles which govern the formation and interpretation of words, phrases and sentences. In term of the traditional division of grammar into morphology and syntax, we can say that morphology studies the formation and interpretation of words, whereas syntax is concerned with the formation and interpretation of phrases and sentences.

According to a recent definition, grammar is “a device that specifies the infinite set of well-formed sentences and assigns to each of them one or more structural descriptions”. That is to say it tells us just what are all the possible sentences of a language and provides a description of them. Webster’s New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition (2000) describes grammar as the study of language which deals with the forms and structure of words (morphology), with their customary arrangement in phrases and sentences (syntax), and now often with language sounds (phonology) and word meanings. The explanation above gives an exact and comprehensive summary of the meaning of grammar.

II . The Importance of Grammar

The purpose of grammar is to help us communicate our ideas effectively. We spend a large part of our waking life speaking,

listening, reading and writing. The central part of a language is its grammar, and this should be of vital interest to any intelligent educated person. If it has not been of such interest, then the fault must be in the way in which it has been presented, or in the failure to recognize its importance within this essentially human activity — language. It is grammar that makes language so essentially a human characteristic, and the link for man is grammar.

By studying a certain amount of grammar — not too much — you can direct your conscious attention to certain features of English so as to grasp these much more quickly.

When we study a foreign language in school, we must study both vocabulary and grammar, and until we can put the two together, we cannot translate the language. Sometimes we know the meaning of every word in a foreign language sentence, and yet we cannot translate the sentence because we cannot figure out its grammar. On the other hand, we sometimes can figure out the grammar of the foreign language sentence, but we still cannot translate the sentence because we do not know the meaning of one or more words in it. For example:

- a. Mr Reynaud proceeded to say that the Council of Ministers had on the previous day instructed him to inquire what would be Britain's attitude should the worst come.
- b. Significant change in the role of the teacher begins when the rate of accumulation of new data forces upon us the realization that real knowledge is infinite and cannot be possessed; that the forms in which the human senses grasp it and the human mind codifies it are tentative and arbitrary, not absolute, and are validated only when knowledge is successfully applied to current needs; that symbolic communication has to be continuously enlarged and enriched, and even created, to accommodate new perceptions; and that skills and mythologies alike are subject to continuous modification.

In the above example a, the students of English cannot figure out the inverted order of the conditional clause in the subjunctive mood, nor can they tell what parts of speech “the worst” is. They cannot translate the sentence into Chinese; and the students cannot translate the example b either because they cannot identify the inversion of realization and upon us, and the four “that” appositive clauses in the sentence.

It is demonstrated that the importance of grammar is

self-evident. Grammar, with a precise vocabulary and proper usage, is one of the greatest keys to good writing, speaking, and a thorough understanding of reading. The better our grasp of grammar, the better we use the language we are learning to speak and write, the clearer and the more precise our communication will be.

III. The Way of Studying Grammar

It is well to keep in mind that language is living, and that expressions have not remained the same over the generations. We do not study grammar for grammar's sake. On the contrary, we study it for practical everyday purposes. What we need study is a current grammar to guide our art of writing clearly, speaking clearly, and understanding what others are trying to say to us.

It is worth noting that grammatical rules ought to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. That is, they will be rules that state what the English natives do in fact say, not rules that state what they ought to say.

In learning language as in doing all other things, practice goes before theory; thus it is to be remembered that in studying English most of our time should be spent reading, listening, speaking and writing the language. When you are ready to express more complicated thoughts in this language, you can go on to study some of its grammar, to find out how the English-speaking people express such thoughts. The proper way to learn grammar is to analyze the language, that is, take apart the various patterns of the language and examine them separately. For in constant practice, the grammar learned will become more and more familiar, and in the end you will be able to use the language quite naturally.

IV. Different Kinds of English

It is important that you should realize there are different kinds of English used for different purposes. This is true to some extent of all languages. If you were speaking in your own language to a high official, for instance, you would not use quite the same expressions as when speaking to your friends, and on ceremonial occasions you may even have to use a kind of ceremonial speech which is quite different

from the speech of every day. Most of the English we learn can be used on all occasions and for all purposes, both in speech and writing. But there are some expressions which belong only to speech, and others which belong only to writing. The English which belongs only to speech is called “colloquial” English, and that belonging only to writing is called “literary” English.

1. Colloquial English

The colloquial English is the language one may normally use in informal contexts, at home, or with friends, as distinct from the more formal English one uses in business letters, speeches, examinations, etc. Colloquialisms therefore belong to the body of language between Standard English and Slang.

Colloquialism is informal Standard English, and consists of a vocabulary and, occasionally, a syntax, and even a pronunciation, not to formal or dignified contexts. Colloquialisms, in time, may be promoted to the status of Standard English or demoted to that of Slang. For example:

- a. If you want to pass the exam, you will have to pull your socks up. (= make a greater effort, try harder)
- b. You can either spend the money on a holiday or buy a new record-player, but you can't have your cake and eat it. (= have two good things at the same time)
- c. “Hands off!” said the shopkeeper to the children standing near the sweet counter. (= don't touch)

When we are speaking, we often use expressions which would seem careless and undignified in writing. This is true of highly educated people as well as everyone else. One of the most familiar examples is the practice of shortening certain common verbal expressions, e.g. “don't”, “won't”, “I'll” (= I will or I shall), “he's” (= he has or he is), etc. These are all common in speech, but are normally avoided in writing unless the writer is purposely using a colloquial style, as when writing a letter to a friend, or when using direct speech to report the exact words which somebody has used. Moreover, in colloquial English we often say things which in writing would be regarded as grammatically wrong. Few people object to the sentence, “Who did you see?” when it is spoken, but if we are writing it we must alter “who” to “whom”, because it is the object of “see” and must take the object form.

2. Slang