A COMPREHENSIVE GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Preface

From the time when we started collaborating as a team in the 1960s, we envisaged not a grammar but a series of grammars. In 1972, there appeared the first volume in this series, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (*GCE*). This was followed soon afterwards by two shorter works, *A Communicative Grammar of English* (*CGE*) and *A University Grammar of English* (*UGE*, published in the United States with the title *A Concise Grammar of Contemporary English*). These two were in part an abridgment of *GCE*, but what is more significant is that they were deliberately different both from the parent book and from each other. This is particularly obvious in the case of *CGE*, which looks at the whole grammar of the language from a semantic and communicative viewpoint. It is less obviously true of *UGE*, which follows the chapter divisions and in most cases the chapter titles of *GCE*, though in fact the abridgment was accompanied by a good deal of fresh thinking and radical revision.

With *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, we attempt something much more ambitious: a culmination of our joint work, which results in a grammar that is considerably larger and richer than *GCE* and hence superordinate to it. Yet, as with our other volumes since *GCE*, it is also a grammar that incorporates our own further research on grammatical structure as well as the research of scholars world-wide who have contributed to the description of English and to developments in linguistic theory.

It scarcely needs to be said that we take full collective responsibility for the contents of this book. But what does indeed need to be said is that it has been immeasurably improved as a result of the generous assistance that we have received, not least from our own students. We have benefited too from the perceptive attention that *GCE*, *UGE*, and *CGE* have received from reviewers throughout the world. But in addition to these scholars and writers, in addition also to the numerous scholars that we acknowledged in earlier prefaces, a further willing band of linguists put themselves generously at our disposal in giving detailed attention to earlier drafts of what has become *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*.

Some few have even undertaken the heavy task of giving a detailed critique of the entire book in such an earlier draft. For their searching work to this degree, we are especially indebted to John Algeo, R A Close, and Robert de Beaugrande, who between them produced hundreds of pages of invaluable comments. But we are grateful also to W N Francis and Bengt Jacobsson, who gave comparably generous and skilled attention to large parts of the book.

Many other scholars have helped us with one or more individual chapters or with specific problems in the description of grammar. We list their names, but this can in no way convey our degree of gratitude or indicate the intellectual effort from which we have benefited: V Adams, B Altenberg, E Andersson, W-D Bald, D L Bolinger, J Coates, R Cureton, L Haegeman, R Ilson, S Johansson, H Kakehi (and his Kobe students), H Kinoshita, T

Lavelle, B Lott, C F Meyer, T Nevalainen, W J Pepicello, G Stein, J Taglicht, J Thompson, G Tottie, T Waida, K Wales. The fact that some of these friends are among the most eminent experts in the world on American, British, and other varieties of English has contributed beyond measure to the confidence with which we assign such descriptive labels as 'AmE' and 'BrE'.

Finally, we take great pleasure in making clear that David Crystal's role has extended far beyond what is indicated on the title page. He has not merely provided the detailed index which will make 'information retrieval' possible; in addition, in the course of this onerous and highly specialized task, he has contributed pervasively to the correction of error, the standardization of terminology, and the improvement of presentation.

But this Preface would be sadly incomplete if we did not also record our gratitude to the grant-giving bodies whose financial help (over and above the support we have received from University College London, Lund University, the University of Lancaster, and the University of Wisconsin) has made our research and writing possible: the Leverhulme Trust, the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the British Academy, the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, and our publishers, the Longman Group.

RQ SG GL JS
February 1985

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Pronunciation table

CONSONANTS				VOWELS	
VOICELESS		VOICED			
/p/	**p**ig	/b/	**b**ig	/iː/	sh**ee**p
/t/	**t**en	/d/	**d**en	/ɪ/	sh**i**p
/k/	**c**ot	/g/	**g**ot	/e/	b**e**d
/f/	**f**at	/v/	**v**at	/æ/	b**a**d
/θ/	**th**in	/ð/	**th**en	/ɑː/	c**a**lm
/s/	**s**oon	/z/	**z**ero	/ɒ/	p**o**t
/ʃ/	fi**sh**	/ʒ/	plea**s**ure	/ɔː/	c**au**ght
/tʃ/	**ch**eap	/dʒ/	**j**eep	/ʊ/	p**u**t
/h/	**h**ot	/m/	**m**um	/uː/	b**oo**t
		/n/	**n**un	/ʌ/	c**u**t
		/ŋ/	su**ng**	/ɜːʳ/	b**ir**d
		/l/	**l**ed	/ə/	ab**o**ve
		/r/	**r**ed	/eɪ/	d**ay**
		/j/	**y**et	/əʊ/	c**oa**l
		/w/	**w**et	/aɪ/	l**ie**
				/aʊ/	n**ow**
				/ɔɪ/	b**oy**
				/ɪəʳ/	h**ere**
				/eəʳ/	th**ere**
				/ʊəʳ/	p**oor**
				/eɪəʳ/	pl**ayer**
				/əʊəʳ/	l**ower**
				/aɪəʳ/	t**ire**
				/aʊəʳ/	t**ower**
				/ɔɪəʳ/	empl**oyer**

Syllabic consonants are indicated thus: n̩, l̩

/ʳ/ denotes the possibility (*eg* in AmE) of 'postvocalic r'.

For indications of stress, intonation, and other prosodic features see App II.

Abbreviations and symbols

A	adverbial
A_o	object-related adverbial
A_s	subject-related adverbial
AmE	American English
aux	auxiliary
BrE	British English
C	complement
C_o	object complement
C_s	subject complement
comp	comparative
E	end position of adverbial
-ed	*-ed* participle form
eM	end-medial position of adverbial
I	initial position of adverbial
iE	initial-end position of adverbial
iM	initial-medial position of adverbial
I/M	initial or medial position of adverbial
-ing	*-ing* participle form
LOB	Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus
M	medial position of adverbial
mM	medial-medial position of adverbial
NP	noun phrase
O	object
O_d	direct object
O_i	indirect object
oblig	obligatory
op	operator
opt	optional
pass	passive
ph	phrasal verb
ph-pr	phrasal-prepositional verb
pr	prepositional verb
R	regular variant (in Ch. 3)
-s	3rd person singular present tense form
S	subject
SEU	Survey of English Usage
StE	Standard English
SV	subject + verb
SVA	subject + verb + adverbial
SVC	subject + verb + complement
SVO	subject + verb + object
SVOO	subject + verb + 2 objects
SVOC	subject + verb + object + complement
SVOA	subject + verb + object + adverbial

} basic structures

T_1	primary time-orientation (in Ch. 4)
T_2	secondary time-orientation (in Ch. 4)
T_3	tertiary time-orientation (in Ch. 4)
V	verb
V-*ed*$_1$	past tense form of the verb (in Ch. 3)
V-*ed*$_2$	*-ed* participle form of the verb (in Ch. 3)
*	unacceptable
?*	tending to unacceptability, but not fully unacceptable
?	native speakers unsure about acceptability
(*), (?)	native speakers differ in their reactions
( )	optional constituent
[ ]	comment (with examples); constituent boundaries; phonetic transcription
⟨ ⟩	style label (after examples); modified constituent (7.50); focused unit (8.116)
{ }	free alternatives, as in:

$$\text{He came} \begin{Bmatrix} \text{to} \\ \text{from} \end{Bmatrix} \begin{Bmatrix} \text{London} \\ \text{New York} \end{Bmatrix}$$

[ ]	contingent alternatives, as in:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{He} \\ \text{She} \end{bmatrix} \text{does} \begin{bmatrix} \text{his} \\ \text{her} \end{bmatrix} \text{best}$$

/	alternatives (in examples)
/ /	phonological transcription
~	systematic correspondence between structures
≁	no systematic correspondence between structures
△	ellipsis marker, indicating grammatical omission
▲	indicates possible semantic implication (in Ch. 19)
=	semantically equivalent
≠	semantically nonequivalent

a 'better GRÀMmar |

Capitals in examples indicate *nuclear* syllables, accents indicate *intonation*, raised verticals *stress*, and long verticals *tone unit boundaries*; for all conventions relating to prosody, see App II.

1 The English language

1 The English language

The English language today

The importance of English

1.1 English is generally acknowledged to be the world's most important language. It is perhaps worth glancing briefly at the basis for that evaluation. There are, after all, thousands of different languages in the world, and each will seem uniquely important to those who speak it as their native language, the language they acquired at their mother's knee. But there are more objective standards of relative importance.

One criterion is the number of speakers of the language. A second is the extent to which a language is geographically dispersed: in how many continents and countries is it used or is a knowledge of it necessary? A third is its functional load: how extensive is the range of purposes for which it is used? In particular, to what extent is it the medium for highly valued cultural manifestations such as a science or a literature? A fourth is the economic and political influence of the native speakers of the language.

1.2 If we restrict the first criterion to native speakers of the language, the number of speakers of English is more than 300 million, and English ranks well below Chinese (which has over three times that number of speakers). The second criterion, the geographical dispersal of the language, invites comparison with (for example) Hebrew, Latin, and Arabic as languages used in major world religions, though only Arabic has a substantial number of speakers. But the spread of English over most of the world as an international language is a unique phenomenon in the world's history: about 1500 million people – over a third of the world's population – live in countries where English has some official status or is one of the native languages, if not the dominant native language. By the third criterion, the great literatures of the Orient spring to mind, not to mention the languages of Tolstoy, Goethe, Cervantes, and Racine. But in addition to being the language of the still more distinguished Shakespeare, English leads as the primary medium for twentieth-century science and technology. The fourth criterion invokes Japanese, Russian, and German, for example, as languages of powerful, productive, and influential nations. But English is the language of the United States, whose gross domestic product in 1980 was more than double that of its nearest competitor, Japan.

No claim has here been made for the importance of English on the grounds of its quality as a language (the size of its vocabulary, its relative lack of inflections, the alleged flexibility of its syntax). The choice of an international language, or lingua franca, is never based on linguistic or aesthetic criteria but always on political, economic, and demographic ones.

The use of English

1.3 English is the world's most widely used language. A distinction is often made that depends on how the language is learned: as a *native* language (or *mother tongue*), acquired when the speaker is a young child (generally in the home), or as a *nonnative* language, acquired at some subsequent period. Overlapping with this distinction is that between its use as a *first* language, the primary

language of the speaker, and as an *additional* language. In some countries (particularly of course where it is the dominant native language), English is used principally for internal purposes as an *intranational* language, for speakers to communicate with other speakers of the same country; in others it serves chiefly as an *international* language, the medium of communication with speakers from other countries.

One well-established categorization makes a three-way distinction between a *native* language, a *second* language, and a *foreign* language. As a foreign language English is used for international communication, but as a second language it is used chiefly for intranational purposes. We can distinguish five types of function for which English characteristically serves as a medium when it is a second language: (1) *instrumental*, for formal education; (2) *regulative*, for government administration and the law courts; (3) *communicative*, for interpersonal communication between individuals speaking different native languages; (4) *occupational*, both intranationally and internationally for commerce and for science and technology; (5) *creative*, for nontechnical writings, such as fiction and political works.

Note [a] A bilingual child may have more than one native language, and a bilingual adult may be equally proficient in more than one first language. In some countries, English is one of two or more languages, and as a foreign language too it may be one of several that are known.

[b] Although one's native language is usually also one's first language, it need not be. People may migrate to a country where a language different from their native tongue is spoken. If they become proficient in the new language and use it extensively, that nonnative language may become their first language, displacing the native tongue. Such displacement has occurred, for example, among Pakistanis in the United Kingdom and among Vietnamese in the United States.

[c] Second-language writers in Southeast Asia and in East and West Africa are making important contributions to English literature. Their writings may incorporate features characteristic of their second-language variety, including rhetorical and stylistic features, but they are generally addressed to, and read by, an international English readership.

Native and second language

1.4 English is spoken as a *native* language by more than 300 million people, most of them living in North America, the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, and South Africa. In several of these countries, English is not the sole language: the Quebec province of Canada is French-speaking, most South Africans speak Afrikaans or Bantu languages, and many Irish and Welsh people speak Celtic languages. But those whose native language is not English will have English as their *second* language for certain governmental, commercial, social, or educational activities within their own country.

English is also a second language in many countries where only a small proportion of the people have English as their native language. In about twenty-five countries English has been legally designated as an official language: in about ten (such as Nigeria) it is the sole official language, and in some fifteen others (such as India) it shares that status with one or more other languages. Most of these countries are former British territories. Despite the association of the English language with the former colonial rulers, it has been retained for pragmatic reasons: where no one native language is generally acceptable, English is a neutral language that is politically acceptable, at least at the national level, for administrative and legal

functions; and as an international language for science and technology it is desirable for higher education. English is an official language in countries of such divergent backgrounds as India, Nigeria, and Liberia, while in numerous other countries (Burma, Thailand, South Korea, and some Middle Eastern countries) it is used for higher education. In Sri Lanka, English at one time lost its official status, while retaining its social, cultural, and economic importance, but it has been reestablished as an official language; indeed, as a result of the increase in secondary education more people today learn English there than at any time during the colonial period. It has been estimated that English is a second language for well over 300 million people: the number of second-language speakers may soon exceed the number of native speakers, if it has not done so already.

Note The significance of English for higher education in second language countries is reflected in statistics for book publishing and literacy in 1981/82 in India. India emerged as the world's third largest publisher of books in English and forty-one per cent of titles produced there were in English, although only 2.3 per cent of the population were literate in English. But that tiny percentage represented 15 million people.

Foreign language

1.5 By *foreign* language we mean a language used by persons for communication across frontiers or with others who are not from their country: listening to broadcasts, reading books or newspapers, engaging in commerce or travel, for example. No language is more widely studied or used as a foreign language than English. The desire to learn it is at the present time immense and apparently insatiable. American organizations such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Voice of America have played a notable role in recent years, in close and amicable liaison with the British Council, which provides support for English teaching both in the Commonwealth and in other countries throughout the world. The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), like the USIA, has notable radio and television facilities devoted to this purpose. Other English-speaking countries such as Australia also assume heavy responsibilities for teaching English as a foreign language.

We shall look more closely in the next sections at the kind and degree of demand, but meantime the reasons for the demand have surely become clear. To put it bluntly, English is a top requirement of those seeking good jobs, and is often the language in which much of the business of good jobs is conducted. It is needed for access to at least half of the world's scientific literature, and the most important scientific journals are in English. It is thus intimately associated with technological and economic development and it is the principal language of international aid. The great manufacturing countries Germany and Japan use English as their principal advertising and sales medium; it is the language of automation and computer technology. Not only is it the universal language of international aviation, shipping, and sport, it is to a considerable degree the universal language of literacy and public communication. It is the major language of diplomacy, and is the most frequently used language both in the debates in the United Nations and in the general conduct of UN business.

Note [a] Some measure of the number and importance of publications in English is provided by the number of translations of English books. In 1977 out of a world total of 50 047 translations of books, 19 577 were from English. The nearest competitors were Russian (6771) and French (6054).

[b] The pervasive influence of English has induced language academies or other language-planning agencies in some countries to attempt to control the range of its functions and to prevent the acceptance of Englishisms (English loan words and loan translations) into their national languages, at least in official writing.

The demand for English

The teaching of English

1.6 The role of chief foreign language that French occupied for two centuries from about 1700 has been assumed by English – except of course in the English-speaking countries themselves, where French or (in the United States) Spanish is the foreign language most widely studied. Although patriotism obliges international organizations to devote far more resources to translation and interpreter services than reason would dictate, no senior post would be offered to a candidate deficient in English. The general equivalent of the nineteenth-century European 'finishing school' in French is perhaps the English-medium school organized through the state education system, and such institutions seem to be even more numerous in the Soviet Union and other East European countries than in countries to the West. There are also innumerable commercial institutions that teach English at all levels and to all ages, both in non-English-speaking countries and in English-speaking countries. Most language learning, of course, takes place in the ordinary schools of the state educational system.

The extent to which English is studied at the school level is shown in one analysis of the educational statistics for 112 countries where English is not a native language, but is either a foreign language or a second language. The study estimates that over 46 million primary school students and over 71 million secondary school students were in English classes in the early 1970s. These figures represent over 15 per cent of the primary school population and over 76 per cent of the secondary school population for those countries. It is significant that English was the medium of instruction for 30 per cent of the primary school students and for nearly 16 per cent of the secondary school students. Estimated figures would have been far higher if statistics for all non-English-speaking countries had been included. (A notable exclusion from the study was the People's Republic of China.) Since the secondary school population is increasing at a rapid rate in the developing countries, we can expect that the number of English learners at the secondary level has increased very considerably since the early 1970s.

Outside the primary and secondary schools, there are large numbers of students in institutions of higher and further education who are learning English for a variety of purposes: as the medium of the literature and culture of English-speaking countries; for access to scholarly and technological publications; to qualify as English teachers, translators, or interpreters; to improve their chances of employment or promotion in such areas as the tourist trade, international commerce, or international programmes for economic or military aid. In countries where it is a second language, English