

J. McH SINCLAIR

**A COURSE IN  
SPOKEN ENGLISH:  
GRAMMAR**

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# Use of this grammar

The original version of this book has been completely rewritten three times. Between each version, it has been used in a variety of teaching situations, and read by a large number of people. The many comments on it range from detailed criticism of the examples to substantial pieces of post-graduate research. It has proved useful in such courses as: advanced English Language teaching in several countries overseas; English Language courses for foreign students and teachers in this country; courses in English linguistics at universities in this country. It has already reached teachers and pupils of almost every nationality, and has been informed by most valuable feedback. This accumulated experience over eight years suggests that three types of reader may find it useful.

- (a) Advanced foreign students of English. They will find it quite difficult, unless they are *very* advanced. A lot of effort has gone into the exercises and keys, and the glossary, to permit a good student to use it privately. Its functions would be to provide explanations of many features of modern English, give some practice in controlled sentence construction and to add some intellectual interest to the later stages of learning English.
- (b) Foreign teachers of English. They should be able to handle the book with a little experience. It should help them to understand many aspects of the structure of English, and they will find that most of the exercises can be adapted for classroom use. The arrangement of the book is not suggested as a plan for the design of a course, however, and teachers will want to rearrange it for that purpose. Much thought has been given to its function as a work of reference for teachers, mainly in the provision of the glossary and many cross-references.
- (c) Native-speaking students of English Language. University and College students can work privately or in class with this book, and it will serve both as a means of learning about English structure and as an introduction to modern linguistics. It provides tools for developing skill in textual analysis, though it does not solve every analytical problem.

Originally, the book was a set of exercises with a few grammatical notes above each exercise. The exercises are still the main feature of the book,

but the notes have been expanded more and more, and are still probably too short for some readers. The presentation is usually by way of many examples, which are contrasted according to relevant criteria. From the contrasts develop systems, such as Section 1 of this book shows. A balance has to be found between the space needed to explain a point, and the importance of the point, because often the major features can be outlined in a few lines, while minor ones may take several pages. Minor points are only developed where it seems to be worthwhile in the book as a whole.

Most of the exercises can be answered by anyone with a fair command of English and an understanding of the text. Some can be answered by deduction from the text only. A few test the wider command of English that not all readers of this book will have. In these cases, the Key to the exercises will help.

A full Key with notes is supplied so that this book can be used in a variety of different ways. On a first reading, a quick reading or revision, it may not be possible to afford the time to work each exercise out; so a few examples read with the Key will suffice. On serious study or revision of one particular area, it would be necessary to read all the examples with the Key. If a distinction or a structural pattern is to be learned, or if skill is required with the analytical system or familiarity with the terminology, the exercises should be fully worked without the Key, and the answers then checked against it.

## Acknowledgements

A book that has been so long in the making acquires many friends, and I cannot list them all. The debt to Angus McIntosh and Michael Halliday should be evident on every page. Particularly thorough and comprehensive criticisms came from Keith Brown, Norman McLeod and Vivian Salmon. Three colleagues in Birmingham (Vera Adamson, Tom Shippey and Malcolm Coulthard) have helped greatly on the practical side—trying to use the book as a teaching instrument to native and foreign students, and this experience has led to many changes in the manuscript. In addition, Dr Coulthard read right through the finished text and made hundreds of detailed suggestions. I am most grateful to these friends and colleagues and hope that the good qualities of this version are some recognition of their trouble and interest.

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# Introduction

## Modern Grammars

What do you think about grammar? Do you, indeed, think about grammar? Is grammar for you something that can be bad, or good? Does it help us to speak languages? Is it something that never survives outside the classroom, and is pretty sick even inside it?

Today there is more work going on in English grammar than in any other branch of language study. Every few months brings fresh evidence, new ideas, and endless technical discussion. Linguistics is one of the enigmatic new subjects that is developing at great speed and becoming more and more difficult to understand.

Every so often it is worthwhile to pause, and consider the way in which the work in linguistics can be applied in the everyday study of languages: the learning of languages; the training of teachers of languages; the business of communication through languages. This book is a grammar of English for a wide audience. It is up to date, in the sense that it is written against the background of the most recent work in English grammar; but it is old-fashioned too, because it tries to be both comprehensive and simple. A new description of some fragment of English structure may cause a chain reaction right through the rest of the grammar, raising a whole set of problems that had not been thought of, or that had been forgotten, or put on one side because they were too difficult; or the innovations may be so detailed and complicated that they would take up far too much space in a small book.

This book is, first of all, a descriptive grammar. It tries to describe the structure of the English people use, and it pays very little attention to matters of 'correctness' in usage. It concentrates on the most common varieties of spoken and written British English, and avoids highly specialised varieties. There is rather more emphasis on informal spoken English than you commonly find in grammars. Some critics of earlier versions of



this grammar asked for a classification of the examples on various scales (e.g. of formality). Certainly it would improve the book if this could be done, but it is beyond the powers of a single author. (A team of experts recently spent three years on a description of just one variety of English!<sup>1</sup>)

So the foreign reader is left with only a few scattered warnings about examples that are restricted to certain varieties of English only. The alternative—to describe just one variety of English—would have involved a long job of statistical analysis, which the Survey of English Usage is already doing.<sup>2</sup>

### Speech and Writing

Speech and writing are different **media**. The structural differences that we notice between a lecture and a book arise partly from the contrast of medium. Pitch of the voice, for example, is used a lot in speech. If the vocal cords vibrate, they must vibrate at a certain frequency; so all the vowels of English, and about half the consonants, have pitch as one of their essential structural components. It is difficult to write down the details of pitch and length, etc. But it is easy to insert lots of small marks between letters and between words—we call them punctuation marks. In turn, it is very difficult indeed to punctuate speech. There are no word-spaces in speech, and the pauses do not occur in places where a comma might occur in writing.

Intonation does for speech something like what punctuation does for writing, and the differences between intonation and punctuation arise from the medium. Speech is continuous modification of a sound-wave; so it would be difficult to keep stopping to put in commas and so on (Victor Borge made himself famous as a comedian by punctuating speech). Writing, even handwriting, comes in separate blocks—letters or words—and it is easy to put small marks in the spaces. Of course, there are many different writing systems in the world, each with its own type of punctuation.

This is just one example of the differences caused by the medium of language. Other differences are caused by the typical situations in which we speak and write. Speech is a **two-way** activity; the **addressee**, the person being spoken to, is usually present and able to interrupt, the speaker is usually able to modify what he wants to say as he goes along; if there

<sup>1</sup> Huddleston *et al.*, *Sentence and Clause in Scientific English*.

<sup>2</sup> The Survey of English Usage is directed by Professor Randolph Quirk at University College, London. Members of the Survey team have already published a number of detailed studies which have informed this work greatly. Details of the Survey, and examples of Quirk's approach, are in his *Essays on the English Language, Medieval and Modern*; Longmans, London 1969.

are other people present the speaker may spend a lot of effort in just finding a moment to start speaking, or in keeping his speech flowing. But writing is typically composed for a remote addressee—some reader at a later date, in very different circumstances. A writer must try to keep up the level of interest for the reader, but he has no fears about being interrupted, or hurried along. He has complete control over the process of composition, while the reader has complete control over the process of understanding. Writing is not the same sort of interaction as speech.

Other speech situations are lectures and talks; the audience is expected to remain silent and listen. They allow the lecturer uninterrupted control of the process of composition. The lecturer, unless he reads out something he has previously written, has a task which is a cross between being a typical speaker and a typical writer. He does not fear interruptions, but he must keep going; he must compose in 'real time' and not at leisure in his study. However **one-way** it looks, there will be a good deal of response from the audience. Laughter, applause, nods, smiles, frowns, hisses, boos are all direct conventional responses, communications from the audience to the speaker, and different from ear-scratching, fidgeting, paper-rustling, sleeping, etc., which tell the speaker indirectly what the audience thinks of his speech but are not verbal communications.

What about two students who pass notes to each other during a lecture? Their activity is in the written medium, but two-way and in real time, so that it has some of the features of spoken conversation.

A major difference between the usual forms of speech and writing is the permanence of writing, as against the impermanence of speech. We do not remember speech accurately unless we try specially, but a writer can refer his readers back twenty pages with the greatest of ease. Our ideas of 'correct' grammar come mainly from study of the written language—speech has been very difficult to study until the present day. It is generally felt that writing should make full use of the permanence of the medium, and should leave no loose ends or ambiguities for the reader to work out.

Speech, on the other hand, is a dynamic process where strict grammatical relationships need only be made across stretches of language a few words long. We do not find only well-defined sentences and paragraphs in speech, and we find quite often that one structure can develop into another without disturbing a listener. Sentences and paragraphs as we know them in writing are divisions of the text; places where the reader can pause, where the grammatical connections are at a minimum. But speakers do not need *grammatical* stopping-places, and they tend to pause in the middle of structures rather than at the boundaries of them. A speaker who 'speaks in sentences' may have trouble in holding his audience.

This book does not attempt to describe the special characteristics of speech, the structural features that do not appear in writing. In particular it does not deal with the 'interaction' side of discourse, the way in which a number of speakers jointly construct a conversation. A lot of research is needed before a description of the real structure of speech can be made. But apart from that, the book tries to give many examples of structures that are common in speech.

### Grammatical Categories and Exponents

The type of description used in this book needs a little explanation. It is now fashionable to use the words **deep** and **surface** to talk about grammars; and grammars are getting deeper and deeper. Depth in a grammar concerns the way in which the grammatical **categories** are related to the **exponents**. First of all, to explain what deep grammars are like, a word about categories and exponents.

A grammatical category is abstract—examples are *definite article*, *subject*, *transitive*, *morpheme*. If you want an answer to the question 'What is a transitive relationship?' you should find it defined in the grammar, because 'transitive' is a technical term. Two different grammars of English will probably have slightly different definitions. We try to make clear what we mean by the categories in two ways:

(a) We define each category in terms of other ones. So we say that 'the subject of a clause is a nominal group which immediately follows the first word of the predicator when the clause is interrogative'. Or we may say that 'the subject of a clause is a nominal group in number concord with the predicator'. Notice that these definitions mention a number of other categories—*clause*, *nominal group*, *predicator*, *mood*, *interrogative*, *number*, *concord*. Each of these has a definition which involves some others, probably including *subject*.

This sort of definition does not make it possible for us to recognise the subject of every clause. Not all clauses are interrogative, so the first definition relies on us being able to imagine the interrogative equivalent of a *declarative* clause—the relationship between Examples (1) and (2) below.

(1) The sparrow has flown away. (declarative)

(2) Has the sparrow flown away? (interrogative)

Number concord can be shown by comparing (1) with (3) below. But it is not present in all clauses, as Example (4) demonstrates.

(3) The sparrows have flown away.

(4) The sparrow/sparrows had flown away.

That is, we would have to change the verb *tense* from *past* to *present*, and show the difference between *singular* and *plural*. We have now used another category—that of tense.

(b) The second way we have of showing what we mean by grammatical categories is the use of examples. Even the four examples so far tell a lot to anyone who is familiar with English. It may not yet be clear what exactly is meant by ‘predicator’, or ‘nominal group’, but a number of such examples, along with their analysis, helps a great deal. Consider (5) and (6) with their analyses in (7) and (8).

(5) The sparrow flew away.

(6) Did the sparrow fly away.

(7) The sparrow	flew	away
subject	predicator	adjunct

(8) Did	the sparrow	fly	away
	subject		adjunct
predicator			

Nearly everyone would be able to analyse these, and thousands of other sentences, by following just the examples so far. Consider (9) and how it is analysed in (10)

(9) My friend has walked from London.

(10) My friend	has walked	from London
subject	predicator	adjunct

All the words of (9) are new in these examples, but there is no difficulty in the analysis.

The examples of actual sentences—nos. (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (9), are exponents: words, letters, punctuation marks and so on that actually make up the language we write. Exponents exist, on the page or on the recording tape, or in the air as someone speaks. They are the physical events that grammars help to describe.

## Deep Grammar

In the examples above, the categories and exponents are very closely related. The sort of grammar we have been doing is surface grammar. Now consider Examples (11) and (12)

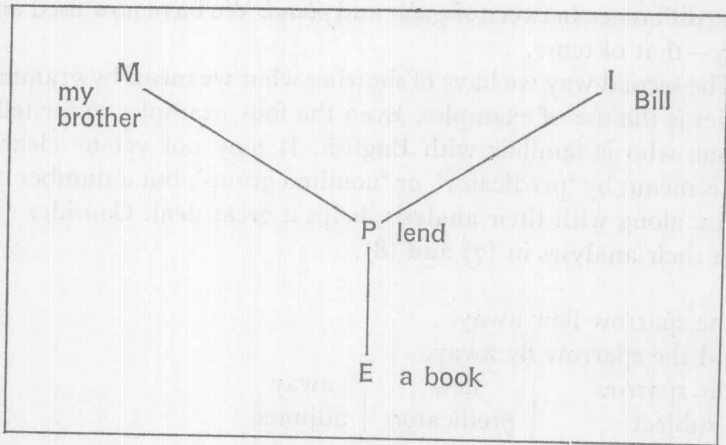


Fig. 0.1. Deep Structure

Surface Structure:	Subject	Predicate	Indirect Object	Object
Example (11)	my brother	lent	Bill	a book
Deep Structure:	M	P	I	E
Surface Structure:	Subject	Predicate	Object	Indirect Object
Example (12)	my brother	lent	a book	to Bill
Deep Structure:	M	P	E	I
Surface Structure:	Subject	Predicate	Object	Agent Phrase
Example (13)	Bill	was lent	a book	by my brother
Deep Structure:	I	P	E	M
Surface Structure:	Subject	Predicate	Agent Phrase	
Example (14)	A book	was lent	by my brother	
Deep Structure:	E	P	M	

Fig. 0.2. Deep and Surface Structure Related

(11) My brother lent Bill a book.

(12) My brother lent a book to Bill.

These two sentences are nearly identical in meaning, so let us call *Bill* or *to Bill* an **Interested Party** (I) to the lending.

(13) Bill was lent a book by my brother.

The sentence has hardly changed in meaning, yet *Bill* is now the subject. We shall call *my brother* the **Prime Mover** (M), and *a book* the **Affected Entity** (E). So in (14) the subject is E.

(14) A book was lent by my brother.

If we call *lent* the **Pivot** (P) of the sentence, we can now relate examples (11)–(14) to each other by saying that they all have the same deep structure, shown in Fig. 0.1, although in each sentence the sequence of the elements is different. This deep structure develops into surface structures as shown in Fig. 0.2.

Notice how the exponent of the subject changes—*my brother*, *Bill*, *a book*. yet the deep category M always relates to *my brother*. Also the sequence of elements changes, and there is no I in (14); yet the deep structure relations do not change.

The word *underlying* is often used to describe deep structure. Here are some more examples:

(15) Bill borrowed a book from my brother.

(16) A book was borrowed from my brother.

Compare (15) and (11)—they are nearly the same in meaning. So are (16) and (14). The difference is that M and I change places. (See Fig. 0.3.)

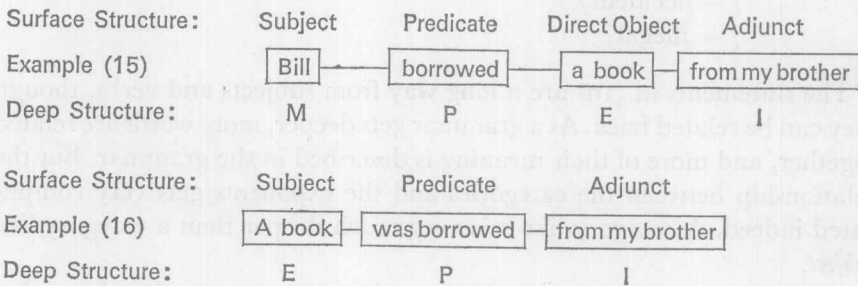
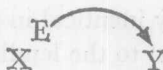


Fig. 0.3

Borrowing and lending are words for the temporary transfer of possessions, which we can symbolise:



Where  $x$  is the Prime Mover (M), the verb is *lend*; where  $y$  is M, the verb is *borrow*.

With this addition to the grammar of Fig. 0.3, sentences that do not look a bit alike can be related, for example (17) and (18)

(17) A collection of old manuscripts was lent to the Town Hall ( $x = M$ )

E P I.

(18) I borrowed £100 ( $y = M$ ) M P E.

There are several other pairs of verbs that seem to fit such a grammar. *Give* and *take* mean a permanent transfer, that does not need the agreement of one receiving party; *lose* and *find* show a transfer that is accidental—and so on. The verbs do not need to be in pairs—one can *find* things that have not been *lost*; *steal* is a verb that has no pair in English meaning *have stolen from*; *send* adds the meaning of something else between  $x$  and  $y$ ; *receive* can pair with *give*, *issue* and *send*, among others.

So deep grammar is an analysis of the meanings of the words at the same time as the structure of the sentences in which they occur. Around the general notion of 'the loss and gain of possessions' there is a cluster of verbs. Each verb adds some details to the notion, and excludes other details. So far we could say the following about our original verb *lend*.

- (19) *lend* [ + transfer of E ]  
 [ +  $x = M$  ]  
 [ + agreement between M and I ]  
 [ + temporary ]  
 [ - accident ]  
 [ - illegal ]

The statements in (19) are a long way from subjects and verbs, though they can be related back. As a grammar gets deeper, more words are related together, and more of their meaning is described in the grammar. But the relationship between the categories and the exponents gets very complicated indeed. A category like  $x$  is very much deeper than a category like *subject*.

Every grammarian has to decide how deep his grammar is going to be. This one keeps as close to surface structure as possible. Every step that it

might take in depth is measured against the amount of complication and abstraction that would be caused. *Lend* and *borrow* are different words in their sound and shape; we can only regard them as exponents of the same word if we have very strong reasons—reasons like (20) for regarding *better* and *good* as the same word.

(20)	small	smaller	smallest
	good	better	best

*Example: Passive voice*

Let us take the example of the **passive** voice in English, to see how deep and surface grammars are related. Three questions must be answered:

- (a) What are the exponents of the passive voice?
- (b) What is the extent of its influence over other choices?
- (c) What can we say about its meaning?

I shall take these in turn.

(a) The exponent of the passive voice is a form of the verb *be* followed, usually straight away, by the *past participle* of a verb.

*Example:*

(21) I was lent a book.

Since past participles commonly occur as *adjectives*, and since the verb *be* has many other uses, the passive is often ambiguous.

(22) The old man was restrained.

Example (22) can be paraphrased in two ways:

- (23) The old man behaved in a restrained fashion; quiet, controlling himself. i.e. he restrained himself.
- (24) The old man had to be prevented from some rather violent action. i.e. someone restrained him.

Example (22) is only passive in the meaning of (24); otherwise it is similar to (25), and the participle is *complement*. (See Section 14, page 105)

(25) The old man was happy.

It is clear from this that a passive verb form must be made up of at least two words; also that there is superficial similarity with another structure of '**copula + complement**'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A recent study of the passive voice by Hasegawa (*Language*, 1968) considers the passive voice as a special type of 'copula + complement'. It should also be noted here that most of our up-to-date information about passives comes from J. Svartvik *On Voice in the English Verb* (Mouton, 1965), a highly technical book.



(b) The influence of the passive over other choices. It is, of course, closely related to **transitivity**; the objects and complements a verb has. Our verb *lend* can have two objects when active, but only one when passive (because one of those objects has become subject: compare (11) and (13)).

Example (26) shows that the passive allows the omission of the phrase that would have been the subject of the active clause, i.e. the person who did the lending.

(26) I was lent a book.

There are many other influences of the passive, but they do not go beyond clause structure. The basic rule to relate active and passive is as follows:

(27) Surface Structure		Deep Structure		Surface Structure
Active	←	P	→	Passive
Subject	←	M	→	(Agent)
Object	←	E	→	Subject

So Example (28) changes to (29)

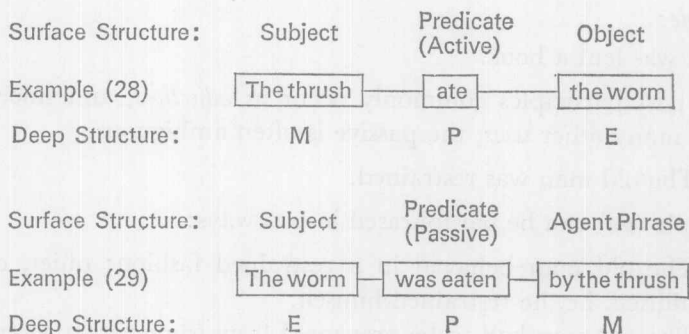


Fig. 0.4

More complicated rules are needed for examples like (11)–(25).

(c) The meaning of the passive. Compare (28) and (29). The same event is described, but in (29) the worm is the item we are supposed to focus on; in (28), if anything, it is the thrush. The fact that *M* is not subject in (29) means that the prime mover of the action is not in close association with the verb.

There is one simple statement that sums up the meaning of the passive, then: its subject cannot be *M*. As the great majority of passives in English