An Introduction to Grammar: Traditional, Structural, Transformational

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Winthrop Publishers, Inc.
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

LaPalombara, Lyda E
An introduction to grammar.

Bibliography: p. 385
Includes index.
1. English language—Grammar—1950– 2. English language—Grammar, Generative. I. Title.
PE1112.L3 425 75-38579
ISBN 0-87626-019-9

Cover design by Ann Washer

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17 Dunster Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

The development of English grammar systems has a long and continuing history. The aim of this book is to trace that history from its earliest beginnings to the current linguistics scene, and thus the scope of the book is large. I have tried to present this vast amount of material in language comprehensible to the beginning language student. The book is intended as an introductory survey both for the prospective English teacher who needs to know something about the evolution of and revolution in English language study, and for the general reader who is fascinated by language study and wants to know more about its intellectual history.

The reader should understand that the "correct" approach to grammar study and the proper philosophy about human nature and human use of language have never been and probably never will be established for all time. No one approach has remained entirely unquestioned, even in its heyday. And that is as it should be. Although prevailing attitudes at various points in our history have usually reflected the culture and intellectual climate of the moment, student and teacher alike should understand that whether or not an idea, an insight, or a whole linguistic philosophy gains recognition in its own time proves nothing about its essential value. My hope is that the acquisition of a body of general information, which this book seeks to provide, will encourage objective, nondoctrinaire attitudes about language on the part of the reader. As an added bonus, perhaps some few students will become sufficiently interested in the truly exciting recent linguistic developments to feel compelled to learn more.

This book is intended to be used as a whole. It presents three major English grammar systems in their historical, chronological order: Traditional Schoolroom Grammar, American Structural Grammar, and Trans-

formational-Generative Grammar. Each of the book's three parts is preceded by a historical background chapter which tries to place the following grammar description in its proper historical context. Anyone who wishes may, in fact, read these three background chapters as they were written: one after the other in a kind of general running narrative which surveys the entire history of language study.

The bulk of the book consists of a presentation of each of the three English grammar systems, along with numerous exercises designed to encourage students to think about what they are reading and to formulate some ideas of their own. Because it is my belief that books which provide hard questions but no answers are needlessly frustrating—and bad pedagogy besides—I have also included an answer key at the end of the volume.

One warning: it is important that the reader understand the sense in which I use the term *grammar*. A grammar system, as here presented, is a theory which attempts to describe and/or explain the sentences of a language. Although certain usage practices and attitudes regarding usage are inevitably discussed, *this is not a usage handbook.*

This volume makes no original linguistic contributions. In fact, I could not possibly have written it without the considerable information gathered from the articles and books listed in the bibliography. Having at one time or another studied all of these sources, and having actually taught from some of them, it is unavoidable that almost all of the ideas herein contained are "borrowed" ones. I suspect that even certain expressions may well have a familiar ring. I would therefore like to acknowledge my indebtedness to these sources and to express my thanks.

My great thanks also go to Paul O'Connell, Chairman of Winthrop Publishers, for his personal faith in me and for his encouragement at all stages in the writing of the book; and to Herbert Nolan, Winthrop's skilled Production Manager, who has cheerfully seen the manuscript through to final publication.

Most particularly, I am grateful to my consulting editor, Professor John Mellon, who patiently read and criticized four or five drafts of the manuscript with great care and scrupulousness. Obviously, I assume final responsibility for whatever flaws may still exist, but Professor Mellon's advice and his linguistic expertise have been invaluable to me.

I also express my thanks to Professor William Osborne, Chairman of the Department of English at Southern Connecticut State College, where I teach, during the time when I was writing the book. I appreciate his encouragement, his understanding, and his willingness to adjust my teaching schedule so that I could have large blocks of time for the project.

Likewise, I owe thanks to my students of the past several years who, with some moans and groans but also with an abundance of good cheer, acted as the guinea pigs on whom I tested the exercises. Many of my

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students offered helpful criticisms and suggestions. Some of them even became enthusiastic about studying grammar!

Finally, I must thank my children, who have suffered with great good sportsmanship through a long bout of living in a manuscript-cluttered house with a mother who has too often been distracted and uncommunicative. They're good kids.

LYDA E. LAPALOMBARA

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PART ONE

Traditional Grammar

1

Historical Background

ANCIENT GREECE

We know that at least as early as the fourth century B.C., Greek philosophers were intrigued by the phenomenon of language. Concerned primarily with large questions about the nature of humans and their universe, and working on the assumption that there *must* exist certain deep and eternal universal truths, these philosophers turned to the study of language—that uniquely human ability—in the hope that here they might discover the answers to some of life's great mysteries. The earliest known motives for language study seem, then, to have been philosophical rather than practical.

It is impossible to assign precise dates to events so far back in history; and we can only guess about humans' speculations on their own existence in the prehistoric period. A good deal of philosophizing must already have taken place, however, for Greek culture was in an advanced stage of development at the time from which, with any degree of certainty, we can begin to trace the progress of Western intellectual history.

A prevailing belief among the earliest Greek philosophers was that language (meaning, to them, the *Greek* language) had been given to humans as a divine gift. Language, they reasoned, must therefore represent divine perfection. This theory of language may seem naive to those of us living in the twentieth century. But remember, at the time when men like Socrates and Plato were sending up these early philosophical trial balloons, their world was very small, and very little was really known. Although they were certainly aware of the existence of other cultures in Europe and North Africa, they believed Greece to have been *the* original

civilization. Thus they had no difficulty in simply dismissing "languages" other than Greek as barbaric, degenerate babblings. Only Greek was considered worthy of serious study.

It is fascinating that similar notions were held by a great number of other isolated cultures. The Jews, the Chinese, the Eskimos, for example, all seem to have reached much the same conclusion. Unaware of or unimpressed with other civilizations, all of these cultures came to think of themselves as the original "chosen" people. Ancient Hebrew philosophers, for example, believed that God had presented to Adam, in the Garden of Eden, a fully developed perfect language (Hebrew, of course). Their explanation for the existence of other languages in the world is recounted in the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel.

Although we have some indication that Plato may have questioned the divine-origin theory, he nevertheless appears to have been influenced by some such notion when he developed his theory of "natural logic." In speculating about words and their meanings, he concluded that a given word bears an *inherent, natural,* and therefore *logical* relationship to the thing or concept for which it stands. That is, he took the position that by its intrinsic, essential nature, one particular word—and only that word—*belongs* to a particular thing.

Believing as he did in the universal "rightness" of words, Plato understandably concentrated his philosophical attention on the analysis of words and their meanings. Thus he devised what is possibly the first word-classification system in the western world. His system, based on meaning, had but two word classes: *onoma* and *rhēma.* He defined words in the *onoma* class as those designating the performer of an action or that about which something is asserted; words in the *rhēma* class were ones representing the performing of the action or the asserting. You may notice that these two word classes bear a striking resemblance to traditional grammar's *noun* and *verb* classes.

Aristotle, Plato's most gifted pupil, continued with the investigation of words and their meanings in his own philosophical inquiries. Among Aristotle's important contributions to language study are these: (1) he added a third word class, *syndesmoi* (roughly equivalent to traditional grammar's *conjunction* class), which included all words that fell into neither of Plato's two classes; (2) he made note of certain structural word features, such as that nouns possess case and that verbs possess tense; (3) he provided what is probably the earliest definition of the term *word,* describing it as the smallest meaningful language unit. This definition, as you will see, is very close to the modern structuralist's definition of the "morpheme."

Aristotle's most important contribution, however, was his carefully

developed system of "natural logic." Aristotelian logic was based on the concept of the syllogism, and Aristotle argued that syllogistic reasoning represented the universal system of human thinking.

After Aristotle, the next important work in language study is that of the Stoics, who made their philosophical inquiries around 300 B.C. The earliest Stoics expanded Aristotle's three word classes to four, adding *articles* to *nouns, verbs,* and *conjunctions.* Later Stoic philosophers subdivided words in the noun class into proper and common nouns. They also made detailed studies of tense and agreement in verbs and of case in nouns, concluding that nouns possess five cases: *nominative, accusative, dative, genitive,* and *vocative.*

The Stoics were also concerned with inquiring into the *nature* of language, their goal being to demonstrate that the outer forms of language reveal inner truths about human nature. Thus, the present-day linguistic interest in the outer and inner forms of language—what transformational grammarians refer to as surface structure and deep structure—may have its first faint beginnings with the work of the Stoics.

One more early Greek philosopher-grammarian, Dionysius Thrax, must be mentioned. Thrax lived in Alexandria during the last great period of the Greek empire, sometime around the first century B.C., when that city had become the center of Greek culture. In a small book entitled *Techne Grammatike,* Thrax expanded the word classes to eight, still basing his classifications largely on meaning. His eight classes were roughly equivalent to *nouns, pronouns, verbs, participles, articles, adverbs, conjunctions,* and *prepositions.* For each of these classes, he gave a detailed definition and provided many examples. This small volume was destined to become so influential that nearly two thousand years later, grammarians throughout Europe and in England were still classifying words into eight categories. To be sure, the names of the classes changed slightly from time to time, but the number remained at eight. Even more important, Thrax seems to have been influential in establishing as linguistic gospel that the best way to describe a language was to begin with a description of its words.

Dionysius Thrax was also influential in another way: it is to this same little book that we can trace the beginnings of a new attitude, one which eventually was to occasion a major break with the original purposes of the philosopher-grammarians who studied language in their search for universals. The earlier philosophers had concentrated their attention on the literary Greek which they themselves used rather than on the spoken Greek of the less well educated, but we have no indication that this was a conscious policy. Thrax, on the other hand, claimed that the *only* language worth the scholar's attention was the literary Greek of the highly educated. The spoken vernacular of the common man, he argued,

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