GRAMMAR
OF
SPOKEN
ENGLISH

HAROLD PALMER

REVISED BY ROGER KINGDON

A GRAMMAR OF
SPOKEN ENGLISH

BY

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AND

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THIRD EDITION

REVISED AND REWRITTEN

BY

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Preface to Third Edition

PALMER's *Grammar of Spoken English* was first published in 1924, and was dedicated to the author's friend, Thomas Beach, with acknowledgement of the advice and encouragement he had given.

After several reprints had appeared the author, with the help of F. G. Blandford, who had already collaborated with Palmer in other works intended to facilitate the study of English as a second language, produced a slightly revised edition, which appeared in 1939. In the preface to this second edition the revisers thanked those who had sent comments on the book, mentioning in particular Lilias Armstrong, G. Noël-Armfield, Dr. Sanki Ichikawa and Dr. James Welton. Special mention was made of the sympathy and stimulus derived from "D. J.", and the revisers, declaring that the book owed its inception to Professor Daniel Jones, recorded their gratitude for his inspiration and encouragement.

It is generally acknowledged that Palmer's *Grammar of Spoken English* is a very important pioneer work which has had a decisive influence not only on the presentation of English grammar to foreign students but also on the course of further research work in this field. Many of the ideas put forward by Palmer have met with widespread acceptance and at the same time further advances have been made. This has had the inevitable effect of making Palmer's grammar begin to "date," and I felt, therefore, that a fairly full revision of the work would be justified—firstly in order to carry the author's ideas to their logical conclusion and secondly, by incorporating some of the latest advances and adding a few ideas of my own, to preserve the pioneer spirit of the original work. In consequence, most of the book has been rewritten on the lines described below.

The detailed Table of Contents has been replaced by a skeleton table supplemented by an alphabetical index at the end of the book. The system of numbered paragraphs has been retained, but the paragraphs have been increased in length and the number of examples given has in many cases been increased. All examples are now transcribed in bold type, which avoids the need for frequent use of square brackets.

The phonetic transcription used in previous editions (often known as the E.P.D. system) has been replaced by the Simplified System

used by an increasing number of phoneticians in books intended for the teaching of English to foreign students. This system, which was recommended to me personally by the late Professor Daniel Jones, uses fewer unfamiliar symbols and thus makes it easier for the uninitiated to read the examples. Alternative pronunciations have not been given; where these exist the one shown is that which I consider most likely to be used by educated people in fluent speech.

Intonation is shown by means of a system which was favourably commented upon by Harold Palmer, though he did not live long enough to experiment with it. This is the Tonetic Stress-mark System which I developed for use in my own works on English stress and intonation. This system, which requires a minimum expenditure of time and space, makes it possible to give an easily readable outline of recommended intonations for all the examples throughout the book. It must, of course, be understood that in many cases alternative treatments are possible, but in every case the intonation shown is one that might well be used by most native English speakers.

The general arrangement of the book has been adhered to, except that *Part IV, Logical Categories*, has been eliminated, as it was felt that it might be better to use the space for a more detailed analysis of verbal structures.

Part I. This has been renamed *Pronunciation* in order to place Tonetics on an equal footing with Phonetics. While the original arrangement has been preserved the whole section has been re-written and the treatment of intonation has been based on my own analysis of the English tunes.

Part II. Palmer's classification of the Parts of Speech has been followed and treated as definitive, though the now widely used term Determiners has been substituted for his Determinatives. Most of the chapters dealing with the parts of speech have been rewritten, particularly the chapter on the Verb, and in this a number of new ideas of my own have been introduced. These entail a radical change in the presentation of verb structure, which may be regarded as too revolutionary, but experience has convinced me that this presentation enables foreign students to understand the English verb system much more easily than has been possible hitherto. The innovations for which I must take full responsibility are:

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1. The placing of the negative conjugating finites on a par with the affirmative ones.

2. The rejection of Palmer's concept of "compound finites" (which are really compounds of finites and verbals) in favour of a clear-cut distinction between finites and verbals, as explained in §125. In the more complicated tenses the verb forms used must then be classed in three categories: first, a conjugating finite, second, either one or two conjugating verbals, and third, a specific verbal. It is hoped that this more careful analysis of the verb forms used will clarify the English tense structure.

3. The introduction of the term "modal tenses" to cover both future and conditional. This, too, makes it easier to learn the tense structure.

4. Certain changes in tense nomenclature which it is hoped will be found more suggestive of the functions of the various kinds of tense.

Part III. The original title *Parts of the Sentence* has been changed to *Sentence Structure* since increased space has been given to an analysis of the various structures used in the four forms of the sentence. Using a new set of symbols to identify the various elements that can enter into the formation of a simple sentence, the analysis gives in tabular form examples of practically every possible structure for all the tenses of the verb. The fact that English is able to express unusually fine shades of temporal and modal meaning has led to a belief in some quarters that the tense system is complicated and unsystematic. It is hoped that this new presentation of the verb will help students to understand the system and will convince them that its reputation is undeserved.

I desire to thank Harold Palmer's daughter, Mrs. Dorothée Anderson, for giving me a free hand in revising her father's work, and the publishers for making this revision possible. My best thanks are also due to Professor Frank Palmer and Professor Randolph Quirk for valuable suggestions, and to my wife, Martha Velarde de Kingdon, for the idea developed in §§373–377 and for help in compiling the index.

<div align="right">R. K.</div>

London, October 1975

Introduction

THE GRAMMAR AND THE DICTIONARY

LANGUAGES are made up of an enormous number of units loosely designated as *words*, each of which has one or more *meanings*. In order to find these we consult a *dictionary*. Thus the dictionary tells us that the word *horse* is associated with a certain animal, or that the word *take* corresponds to certain activities (such as *seizing, conveying, conducting,* etc.), either by describing them or by giving the equivalents of the word in some other language. In similar ways it gives us the meanings of such words as *good, five, quickly,* or *yesterday*. All words having a character comparable to those quoted above are considered by Sweet[1] as being *independent sense-units*, and he terms them Full Words (now generally known as Content Words). But in addition to such full words we find words which have little or no independent meaning, but merely express relations between the different parts of a sentence; instead of having distinct *semantic* functions they have *syntactic* or *grammatical* functions. Such words (e.g. *of, to, the, is*) are termed by Sweet Form-words (now generally known as Structural Words). This distinction is in many ways a convenient one, but it is not always easy to draw a line between the two classes.

The inexperienced student might imagine that it is possible to learn a foreign language on a lexical basis alone, and the authors of some artificial languages seem to have had in view a system for which the dictionary would afford a complete key. But in natural languages we find that certain conceptions of number, time, relation, etc., are not represented by specific *words*, but by devices such as word-order, inflexion, intonation, or the use of affixes; such devices I have termed *alogisms*.[2]

What may be expressed in one language by means of a structural word may be expressed alogistically in another, thus the French *boîte à allumettes* is equivalent to the English *matchbox*, the relational

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[1] *New English Grammar,* §§52, 58.

[2] *The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages,* pp. 12, 39, 41, 45, and Appendix II.

idea represented by the structural word *à* being expressed by the English word-order. Conversely, the English *he will come* is equivalent to the French *il viendra*, the English structural word *will* being expressed by the inflected form of the French verb *venir*. The tendency of English during the whole of its history is to substitute structural words for inflexions.

It would almost seem that the scope of the dictionary should be confined to content words, and that structural words and their alogistic equivalents should be relegated to the grammar-book. This, however, is neither possible nor even desirable, for, apart from the difficulty of drawing a line between the two, a given word may sometimes be one and at other times be the other. Moreover, in many cases a word expresses both a semantic conception and one or more grammatical conceptions. The word *horses* not only evokes in our minds the idea of a certain animal, but it also evokes the conception of plurality. Even the word *horse* conveys, in addition to its primary meaning, the idea of "singularity." The word *took* corresponds to the ideas of seizing, conveying or conducting, etc., but also evokes the idea of "pastness." The word *better* suggests not only goodness, but also *relative* goodness. The word *me* suggests the *ego* and also the objective relation. The word *my* evokes the *ego* and possession.

The dictionary therefore explains content words and structural words alike, while the grammar-book describes and explains all phenomena which can be brought under general rules.[1] It classifies words and states the peculiarities of each category. To do this effectively and economically, it creates as many categories as are deemed necessary or expedient, and designates each by a term which will enable us to recognize it.

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[1] We have seen that the phenomena of language are of two kinds: those which can be brought under general rules and those which cannot. The only phenomena that can be brought under general rules are those that have something in common, by which they are associated together in the mind by the psychological process of *group-association* by which *association-groups* are formed. There are in every language an endless number of these groups, and one and the same word may belong to several such groups at once. Thus the words *trees, towns, boys,* form an association-group through having the same "inflection" *-s,* and having the meanings "more-than-oneness" in common. Sweet, *New English Grammar,* §20.

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We do not say *this books*, in educated English speech we do not say *I are*, and no Frenchman ever says *le table*. But in quite another order of incompatibility we do not speak of *warm ice*, for, as far as we know, such a substance does not exist; we do not speak of a *triangle with four corners*, for such a figure is inconceivable; these would be nonsense expressions. But *this books are all mine, I are busy*, or *voici le table* are not nonsense expressions; they make sense but they offend against *grammatical* usage.

The dictionary only gives us such information as will enable us to avoid nonsense expressions, it is silent concerning the grammatical incompatibilities; for information and guidance concerning these, we must have recourse to *grammar*.

THE UTILITY OF A GRAMMAR

Most educationists probably agree that the sort of English grammar which is intended to serve as a series of "directions for use" for the benefit of the foreign adult student of English must differ very widely (if not fundamentally) from the sort of English grammar taught in English schools to English school children.

This *Grammar of Spoken English* is intended to be used chiefly (but not exclusively) by foreign adult students of English, and by all teachers of spoken English. The fact that it is written *in English* shows that it is not intended to be put into the hands of beginners; it is designed to help (*a*) those who are already able to understand written English, and (*b*) the English teachers who teach living English speech.

Such a grammar helps foreign students by economizing time. It is impossible to learn a language by memorizing it word by word and sentence by sentence, for the number of possible sentences in a language is practically limitless. If, when we form original sentences of our own, we build them up synthetically by piecing together the units of which they are composed, what usually results is a foreign caricature of some sentence of our own language. It is clear to-day that we must form original sentences *from analogous sentences which have been* (consciously or unconsciously) *memorized at some previous time*.

The process is that now known as *substitution*; the following example shows how it works: Consciously or unconsciously a foreign

student has memorized the sentence *If I'd seen him yesterday I should have spoken to him.* He has also memorized such isolated words or word-groups as *written, met, her, last week,* and has become aware that English grammatical usage allows him to replace *I'd* by *he'd, she'd* or *they'd, seen* by *met, him* by *her* or *them, yesterday* by *last week* or *a few days ago, I should* by *he would, they could* or *we might, spoken* by *written, to him* by *to her* or *to them.* In consequence therefore of having memorized the sentence and the isolated words and word-groups, *and having become aware of certain grammatical categories,* he is able to recognize at first hearing and to produce instantaneously and automatically any of the following 1,728 sentences, all of which (with one exception) are original or non-memorized.[1]

If I'd	seen	him	yesterday,	I should	have	spoken	to him.
If' he'd	met	her	last week,	he would		written	to her.
If she'd		them	a few days ago,	they could			to them.
If they'd				we might			

By applying this process of substitution we can form an unlimited number of correct sentences. But to do this the student must know the various grammatical categories, otherwise he may proceed according to false analogies. Having memorized *ought you to go?* he may form by false analogy: *want you to go?* Having memorized *I hope to go,* he may derive from this: *I think to go.* If he is not aware of the limited extent of the category *written, driven, ridden,* etc., he may introduce into it such an invented form as *arriven.*

The chief function of a grammar-book is to furnish the student with categories which will enable him to perform the greatest number of useful substitutions. In many cases the grammar merely sets forth either the whole or the most frequently-used members of each category. In other cases it is possible to frame a "grammatical rule," by which the student can draw up his own category. It is, however, safer to furnish the student with the actual members of the category, for he may feel that it is enough for him to have to learn the contents of a given category without having, in addition, to work it out for himself from abstract rules and formulae.

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[1] See my *100 Substitution Tables* (Heffer), *Principles of Language Study,* pp. 175–177 (Harrap), *Systematic Exercises in Sentence-Building, Classroom Procedures and Devices, Mechanism Grammar, Automatic Sentence-Builder* (the last four published by the Institute for Research in English Teaching, Tokyo).

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In this book the foreign student will find a selection of what the author considers to be the most useful grammatical categories of spoken English. In many cases the actual word-lists are provided, those being drawn in most cases from lists of the 2,000 most useful words. In other cases, the word-lists themselves are replaced by grammatical rules and explanations. The copious examples given to illustrate every rule afford full opportunities for the process of substitution. A serious endeavour has been made to treat each subject according to its importance. The aim throughout has been to show students how to form original sentences rather than to give detailed instructions concerning word-building. Information which can be found in a good dictionary has been omitted, except in a few instances in which the author has judged it expedient to encroach on the scope of the dictionary.

"SPOKEN" AND "WRITTEN" ENGLISH

The terms "spoken" and "written" are open to more than one interpretation. In the present case, the term *Spoken English* should be taken to mean "that variety of English which is generally used by educated people (more especially in the South of England) in the course of ordinary conversation or when writing letters to intimate friends." The term *Written English* may be taken to cover those varieties of English that we generally find in printed books, reviews, newspapers, formal correspondence, and that we sometimes hear in the language of public speakers and orators, or possibly in formal conversation (more especially between strangers).

The terms "spoken" and "colloquial" are frequently used synonymously; when this is the case, the term "colloquial" is assumed to have the connotation used above, and not that connotation which would make it synonymous with "vulgar" or "slangy." Similarly, the term "written" is frequently used as a synonym of "classical" or "literary."

All words and examples are given in phonetic transcription, the only possible procedure to follow when dealing with the spoken form of a living language whose orthographic and phonetic systems are mutually at variance.[1] Moreover, throughout the book the

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[1] Not only do the aims of grammar teaching need restating, but its methods need radical reform. Nearly all text-books on grammar are written as if English were a dead language. Their rules, examples and exceptions are

examples have been shown with recommended stressing and intonation, since these form an integral part of the grammar of Spoken English.

THE GRAMMAR OF USAGE

One of the most widely diffused of the many linguistic illusions current in the world is the belief that each language possesses a "pure" or "grammatical" form, a form which is intrinsically "correct," which is independent of usage, which exists, which has always existed, but which is now in danger of losing its existence. For, according to this theory, there exist in all lands enemies of the language; those who, from perversity or from neglect, are attempting to defile the well of pure language. Among those enemies are assumed to be the careless slipshod writers who do not trouble to study their grammars, the uneducated who are too lazy to learn their own language, and the slovenly speakers who mumble their syllables instead of articulating them. According to this theory, there also exist Defenders of the Faith (generally assumed to be the "best" authors and the "best" speakers), and there is waged a long and bitter struggle between the followers of Ormuzd and Ahriman. Those who declare themselves as being "on the side of the angels" may indeed confess to certain shortcomings in respect to the "purity" or "correctness" of their personal speech, but endeavour to make up for those regrettable lapses by the zeal with which they pillory the lapses of their fellow-sinners.

"It has now become practically impossible for any writer so to express himself that he shall not run foul of the convictions of some person who has fixed the employment of a particular word or construction as his test of correctness of usage. Should any person

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expressed in the form of our conventional spellings rather than of the spoken words or syllables which those spellings represent, often very inadequately. Few school grammarians appear to realize that a living language is composed of sounds, not of letters; for example, to state the rule for the plural inflexion of English nouns in terms of spelling without the use of phonetic symbols is quite misleading. . . . The teaching must be closely allied with phonetics, since the first fact to be learnt about language is that it is composed of sounds, and since there are some grammatical notions which it is impossible to convey without the use of phonetic symbols.—*Report of the Government Committee on the Teaching of English in England*, §§258, 264.

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seriously set out to observe every one of the various and varying utterances put forth for his guidance by all the members of this volunteer army of guardians of the Speech, he would in process of time find himself without any language to use whatever."[1]

One of the best proofs of the prevalence of this theory is the persistence of that age-long series of enquiries "Where is English best spoken?" "In what part of France do they speak the most correct French?" "Where is purest German to be found?" etc. etc. The mere use in this connection of such terms as "best" or "correct" implies that there is in the mind of the enquirer an implicit belief in the existence of some standard or super-dialect the superiority or intrinsic "correctness" of which cannot be questioned. The only possible answers to such questions are: "The best Scottish-English is spoken in Scotland"; "The best American-English is spoken in the United States"; "The purest London-English is to be found in London"; "The most correct Parisian-French is used in Paris"; "The ideal Viennese-German is spoken in Vienna"; "The only pure form of Slocum-in-the-Hole-English is used at the village of Slocum-in-the-Hole."

With this our questioners are not satisfied; they say, "Oh, but I am not speaking of local dialects and suchlike debased forms of language; Where is the standard language spoken? Where do they speak Real English?—Genuine French?—Pure German?" etc. The answer is: "There is no Real, Genuine or Pure English, French, etc., and there never has been." But the chimerical idea of a standard dialect still persists. In vain do the most eminent and most respected linguistic authorities deny its existence; in vain do the most erudite grammarians and etymologists assure us that the sole standard is and always has been that of correct usage. From the time of Horace[2] down to the time of Hales,[3] Sweet,[4] Lounsbury,[5]

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[1] Professor Thomas R. Lounsbury in an article entitled *The Standard of Usage.*

[2] ". . . si volet usus,
   Quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi."
                    —*Horace in his treatise on the Poetic Art.*

[. . . if it shall be the will of usage, in whose power is the decision and authority and the standard of speaking.]

[3] "The vulgar grammar-maker, dazzled by the glory of the ruling language,

Wyld,[1] Jespersen and Bloomfield, the standard of usage has remained supreme and unquestioned by those who have come to understand something of the nature of language. That usage is ruled by grammar is a thesis only defended to-day by the uninformed.[2]

The amateur grammarian or the "member of the volunteer army of guardians of the Speech," while pointing out in the abstract the proprieties or improprieties of speech, is generally perfectly unconscious of the forms of speech which he uses himself. He warns the unsuspecting foreigners against what he calls "vulgarisms," and says to him, "Don't ever use such vulgar forms as *don't* or *won't*; you won't hear educated people using them!" or "Never use a preposition to finish a sentence with!" or he may say, "I don't know who you learn English from, but you are always using the word *who* instead of *whom*."[3] Or we may hear him say, "Oh, I've got something else to tell you: don't say *I've got* instead of *I have*."

knew no better than to transfer to English the schemes which belonged to Latin."—J. W. Hales.

[4] "The first object in studying grammar is to learn to observe linguistic facts as they *are*, not as they *ought* to be, or as they were in an earlier stage of the language."—Sweet.

[5] ". . . were grammars and manuals of usage absolutely trustworthy. But no such statement can be made of most of them, if, indeed, of any. It is an unfortunate fact that since the middle of the eighteenth century, when works of this nature first began to be much in evidence and to exert distinct influence, far the larger proportion of them have been produced by men who had little acquaintance with the practice of the best writers and even less with the history and development of grammatical forms and constructions. Their lack of this knowledge led them frequently to put in its place assertions based not upon what usage really is, but upon what in their opinion it ought to be. They evolved or adopted artificial rules for the government of expression. . . . As these rules were copied and repeated by others a fictitious standard of propriety was set up in numerous instances, and is largely responsible for many of the current misconceptions which now prevail as to what is grammatical."—Professor Lounsbury.

[1] "A grammar book does *not* attempt to teach people how they *ought* to speak, but, on the contrary, unless it is very bad or an old work, it merely states how, as a matter of fact, certain people *do* speak at the time at which it is written."—Professor Wyld.

[2] "There is no such thing as English Grammar in the sense that used to be attributed to the term."—The Board of Education's Circular on *The Teaching of English in Secondary Schools* (1910).

[3] See Coleman's *The Kind of English I use in Ordinary Conversation*, as quoted in my *English Intonation*, pp. 99–105.

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Now in the everyday speech of educated people those (and many other) so-called "vulgarisms" are constantly heard. Sweet calls them "theoretical vulgarisms," and observed their extreme frequency in the speech of those who so hotly denounce them. If such expressions are "ungrammatical" we must conclude that the vast majority of educated persons (not to mention the uneducated) have established *the usage of ungrammatical forms*. In which case the forms cease *ipso facto* to be ungrammatical.[1] The sort of English described and taught in the following pages is that used in everyday conversation by the vast majority of educated speakers of English. In pronunciation, in choice of words and expressions, and in grammatical usage, it represents faithfully the type of dialect which the author has carefully and conscientiously observed in the speech of the majority of those with whom he has generally come into contact. It is, moreover, the only spoken dialect which he feels competent to teach.

There are, of course, many different styles of pronunciation in English, but for the purpose of teaching the language to foreign students it is advisable to choose one that is most widely useful to them. The best dialect for this purpose is probably the one that has been called Received Pronunciation, and it is this that will be represented in this book. It is that given in Professor Daniel Jones's *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, viz. "that most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern English persons whose men-folk have been educated at the great public boarding schools. . . . It is probably accurate to say that a majority of those members of London society who have had a university education, use either this pronunciation or a pronunciation not differing very greatly from it."

SCHEME OF CLASSIFICATION

In books devoted to teaching grammar of the conventional type it is usual to establish two main divisions, these being variously termed:

1. *Accidence, Etymology, Parsing, the Grammar of Words.*

2. *Syntax, Analysis, the Grammar of Sentences.*

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[1] "Whatever is in general use in a language is for that reason grammatically correct."—Sweet's *New English Grammar*, §12.

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Without necessarily objecting to this twofold division, I find it more convenient and more in accordance with the nature of modern spoken English to adopt a different order of classification and to treat the various classes of grammatical phenomena under the following headings:

1. *Pronunciation,* including the study of sounds, stress and intonation.

2. *Parts of Speech,* their forms and functions.

3. *Parts of the Sentence,* or the syntax of the sentence.

For ease of reference, the whole of the material has been divided into paragraphs.

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