A Short Course in GRAMMAR

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A Short Course (IN) Grammar

A Course in the Grammar of Standard Written English

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For Justin

PREFACE

A Short Course in Grammar came into being the way most textbooks do. Over several years of teaching English grammar to undergraduate and graduate students, I discovered that out of a wide range of available books none precisely fitted my needs and that I would have to rely on my own materials. At first these materials were supplementary. They reinforced the written exercises of excellent textbooks like Sidney Greenbaum's *College Grammar of English* with diagrams and explanatory handouts. But eventually the extra articles started to live a life of their own, and there came a time when I relied on them exclusively, without a textbook. Discussions with colleagues at other institutions convinced me that the special needs I experienced were not unique and that others would find my written modules useful. W. W. Norton & Company showed an interest in seeing them developed as a book.

The needs the book was to meet were quite specific. First, it must address the college or postcollege writer. This meant that the material had to be presented with sensitivity to an audience of educated adults whose previous exposure to grammar had been in high school or even earlier. This audience did not lack knowledge or sophistication, and would certainly have resisted being treated as beginners, but they needed a course that started with few or no assumptions about their previous understanding of grammar and that brought them to a level of knowledge at which they could confidently analyze most types of sentence they would use or encounter.

A second need was a judicious blend of theory and grammatical knowledge. The textbook must handle a range of frequently used grammatical constructions and study them with some precision. This meant presenting some system of diagramming sentences that would reveal their structure and their relationships to other constructions.

The third need reflected a practical problem that was familiar to many teachers of grammar: only a single term could be spared for this subject. However, the sort of formal refinement that was required called for theoretical concepts that would alone consume the entire semester. The dilemma seemed to be either to teach grammar anecdotally, without the two-dimensional diagrams that permitted constructions to be visualized, remembered, and extended to new examples, or to be resigned to teaching linguistic theory with only a minimal concern for the special needs of writers.

The present textbook seeks a compromise: a framework that will permit a set of useful grammatical concepts to be taught through a system of diagramming simple enough to be mastered in a single academic term. The grammatical concepts used, and the associated terminology, derive largely from the British school of grammatical pedagogy enshrined in Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik's *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Longman) and Greenbaum's *College Grammar of English* (Longman). The

general approach is monostratal—that is, it avoids as far as possible multiple levels of analysis and phantom elements.

The system of diagramming is a form-function one—that is to say, diagrams include simultaneous reference to forms like *Noun Phrase* and functions like *Subject*. Several textbooks (and theories) that present diagramming have recognized the need to combine grammatical categories with grammatical functions in a single diagram, but the display has not generally progressed beyond the Reed and Kellogg stage of double labeling, usually some variant of *NP:Subject*. The idea of combining a syntactic form diagram above the sentence line with a corresponding hierarchical underlining of functions below the sentence line is a useful innovation in grammar pedagogy. It was developed by Mickey Noonan, of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, for grammar courses taught there by him, but has not to my knowledge been published. Professor Noonan is not responsible for any of the uses I have made of this idea in the present book.

The analyses themselves are basically quite standard, but some departures from orthodoxy have been made in the light of my own teaching experience. Linguists may note, for example, the insistence on equating the function of the head of a phrase with the entire phrase, so that in *An alert bystander grabbed him* the word *bystander* is a Subject by virtue of being the head of the Subject noun phrase *an alert bystander*. The alternative of assigning *bystander* the function of Head (reserving the function of Subject for the entire noun phrase) makes for problems of presentation when phrases consist of a single word (for example, one does not know whether to call *onlookers* in the sentence *Onlookers were shouting* a Head or a Subject). I am also aware of what I hope are minor inconsistencies that result from my conscious avoidance of X-bar, a convention that allows elegant solutions in places where phrase and category appear to conflict, such as in compound nouns. The theoretical complexity introduced by X-bar is, in my experience, more costly in terms of classroom time and student confusion than is warranted at the elementary level by the relatively small gain in analytic delicacy. Teachers who are granted the luxury of a second term of grammar can take up some of the issues raised by these decisions later.

The sociolinguistic posture of the book is somewhat conservative. It can be said broadly to be normative—that is, it is assumed throughout that a relatively fixed form of English exists, the formal written language, and that serious writers will wish to learn more about its conventions. This written standard is, however, carefully distinguished from colloquial spoken usage, as well as from casual writing, and students are reminded frequently that to aim for correctness in writing does not mean discarding their own accustomed habits of speech; students should not be made to feel they speak incorrectly and need a course in grammar in order to improve their speech. The opening chapter lays out some basic sociolinguistic notions such as genre, register, and regional dialect. The treatment of areas of written English where change is under way, or that have been the object of more or less random prescriptivism, is

fairly liberal. The Passive, for example, is afforded its rightful place as a useful, important, and stylistically appropriate construction. The relative pronoun *which* is allowed in restrictive relative clauses (as in *The language which was used in the conference was English*). The objective form of the pronoun is recommended after *than,* as in *He is taller than me.* What might seem like an inordinate amount of attention paid to prepositional phrases is spurred by my conviction that prepositions constitute a central aspect of English style and that clarity and unimpeded written communication are significantly advanced by the ability of the writer to distinguish among fundamental types of prepositional phrase.

Numerous students and colleagues have participated in the production of this book. The primary guinea pigs for the successive drafts have been the graduate students in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program at Carnegie Mellon. Their enthusiasm and good humor as they suffered through the obligatory "grammar course" in their first term are beyond compare; not only have they made grammar fun to teach, but they have over the years also given many valuable suggestions on how I might improve the text, and their input has crucially shaped it. My valued colleague and teaching partner in the grammar-style course sequence, Erwin Steinberg, has supported the project generously and given me the benefit of his long experience in the study and teaching of written English. Ceci Ford, Don Hardy, Barbara Muse, Dave Kaufer, Ritva Laury, Richard Cureton, Dianne Gigler, Julie Woodson, and Tom Straw are among those from whose input and support I have benefited inestimably. Haj Ross has been only a phone call away when I needed the advice of a veteran syntactician. My editors at W. W. Norton, Carol Hollar-Zwick and Jennifer Bartlett, were always available with the requisite combination of reassurance and expertise, not to mention patience with an author facing for the first time the complexities of commercial publication. The copy editor, Deborah Gerish, has worked hard on the manuscript, and her alertness and experience have saved us from many errors. Helen Hopper has shared lovingly and uncomplainingly in the intellectual and emotional toil.

A special word of thanks is reserved for Johanna Rubba, of California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo. She has commented meticulously on practically every page of an earlier draft, and her astute insights into questions of grammar, usage, and pedagogy have resulted, quite simply, in a better book. While holding her blameless for any errors I permitted to remain, I am most grateful to her.

Paul J. Hopper
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A Short Course in Grammar

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:
PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

1.0 A World Language

English is spoken natively by about 400 million people and learned as a second language by perhaps twice that number. While these two figures added together still amount to less than the number of speakers of Chinese, the preeminent position of English in world affairs is owed to its global geographical spread and its prominence as a language of wider communication.

Besides being the national language of several important countries, for most of the twentieth century English has enjoyed a privileged status as the recognized world language of science, business, and diplomacy and is widely used in any sphere where a default language must be chosen, such as multinational conferences, air traffic control, and the administration of international organizations like the United Nations. English is the unquestioned *lingua franca* of the worldwide computer culture. It is the standard written language of international scholarship. Scholars all over the world recognize the reality that it is only through English that an international audience can be reached, and that a grasp of at least written English is essential to gain a truly international reputation. And English is on the way to becoming the official language of the European Union.

1.1 The Historical Background

The origins of English are in medieval England and, going back a bit earlier, the northern parts of Europe. English was brought to the British Isles by invaders from the coastal areas of present-day Germany, Denmark, and the Low Countries. Among these invading tribes were Angles and Saxons, two closely

related peoples, and the oldest period of the English language is for this reason often known as Anglo-Saxon.

> ### By the Way:
> The exact origin of these two names is not known. Some scholars think it likely that the Angles inhabited a narrow land, *ang* being a word that meant "narrow," and that the Saxons were "axe-people" (*sax* = "ax").

A group of languages that are linked historically can be represented as a family tree, with languages standing in such relations as "parent," "sister," "daughter," and "cousin." Historically, English is a member of the Germanic group of languages. Some of the languages of the Germanic family whose names are probably familiar to you are German, Swedish, Dutch, and Norwegian. These languages are sisters or cousins of English. The parent language from which they are all descended is referred to as **Proto-Germanic**. No physical evidence, such as documents or inscriptions, of this language has survived. However, some of its features have been reconstructed through painstaking grammatical and historical comparisons of the Germanic languages that have been undertaken by scholars over the past two centuries. This research has also shown that there are subgroupings within the family. One commonly used grouping would show the relationships roughly as follows:
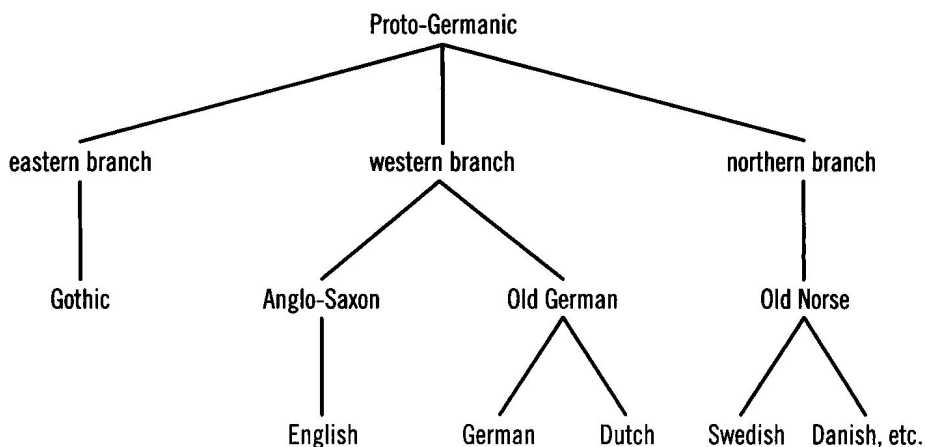
Diagram 1A.   Germanic languages.

Notice here that the term "German" stands for a language that is related to English but is not a descendant or ancestor of English. Rather, English and German are like cousins that are descended from the sister languages Old German and Anglo-Saxon; they belong together in the western branch of Germanic.

Some members of the Germanic language family are known only through written texts; this is true of Gothic, the only representative of the East Germanic group of which we have extensive knowledge.

> **By the Way:**
>
> In older scholarship, and even today in some dictionaries, you will find the term "Teutonic" in place of what is more generally called "Germanic," and occasionally the currently accepted term "Proto-Germanic" appears as "Primitive Teutonic." You will sometimes need to know this term when you are looking words up in a dictionary.

From the time of its first documentation in texts dating from the eighth century, English has been influenced by other languages. For about two centuries (the tenth and eleventh centuries), the English had to share their land with Viking settlers who spoke Old Norse, a North Germanic language that is the ancestor of Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, and Norwegian. In 1066 the Normans conquered England and became the ruling class. The Normans, who inhabited the north of France, were themselves of Viking descent, but they had adopted the French language a few generations earlier. Consequently French was the administrative language of England for the next three centuries. During the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a time of the revival of classical learning, many words from (or based on) Latin and Greek entered English to form the backbone of the scientific and philosophical vocabulary.

Today, the English vocabulary consists of a mixture of words from these sources. Modern English is a Germanic language whose Anglo-Saxon roots are heavily overlaid with Norse, French, Latin, and Greek words. Not only the vocabulary but the grammar of English may also have been affected by its interactions with other cultures. English is a highly analytic language. This means that it indicates relationships among words in a sentence by the order of words and by putting words together in combinations rather than by adding suffixes to the words themselves. In this respect, English differs from, for example, Latin and Russian, which are inflected rather than analytic languages. Some linguists believe that the very simple word structure of English is the result of a history of bilingualism (between Anglo-Saxons and Normans, between Anglo-Saxons and Danes) in earlier periods of the language.

> **By the Way:**
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> There are several good histories of English if you would like to pursue this topic in more detail. One of the best is Celia Millward's *A Biography of the English Language* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988). And don't forget encyclopedias and Internet reference works.

1.2 A Complex Language

Like any language spoken by large and diverse modern societies, English exists in countless varieties. In this book, we are studying English grammar. But the term "English grammar" immediately raises a difficult question of what, or perhaps whose, grammar.

Variation in Speech and Writing

Speech is influenced by many factors in our social environment, such as

- immediate family members
- peer group members considered worthy of emulation
- classes on grammar and style taught in our early years of schooling
- popular books and articles on the English language, including columns by people like William Safire and "Miss Grammar"
- role models of various kinds, such as movie stars, TV personalities (including network newscasters), and other public figures
- schoolteachers and college professors

While your speech may be continually changing in small ways to reflect the influence of these models, the environment of your childhood years will largely determine such things as your regional accent and whether you speak an ethnically marked variety such as African American English or English with a component of Spanish.

Remember that this is true of everyone—we are *all* brought up in a region, and in a sense *everyone* has an ethnic accent. But we are also led to believe that some regional and ethnic accents are less desirable than others, and often this element of desirability may be confused with that of correctness. For very complicated reasons, for example, we may feel that someone who speaks with a white, urban, educated, midwestern accent, such as NBC's Tom Brokaw, is speaking more "correctly" than someone who was raised in a small town in the Deep South.

Perhaps because it is perceived as a neutral accent, not clearly identified with a particular region, ethnic group, or social class, the English of educated national newscasters like Tom Brokaw (sometimes called "Network English") is as close as American English comes to a standard spoken variety.