

Norman C. Stageberg

An Introductory/ English Grammar

FOURTH EDITION

AN INTRODUCTORY ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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NORMAN C. STAGEBERG

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to the Instructor

This is a college textbook of English grammar. It is essentially a structural grammar, with borrowings from transformational grammar and from European scholarly traditional grammar.

The limitations of a one-volume grammar must be acknowledged. No one has ever written a grammar describing completely the English language. The fullest grammars are those of Poutsma and Jespersen, running respectively to five and seven bound volumes; and these—admirable as they are and packed with fine material—do not cover the ground.* We must therefore expect that a single volume can at best present only the central features of English grammar and offer methods of description students can use in analyzing any further data they may collect. And we must expect to find rigorously curtailed or omitted altogether those refinements, exceptions, moot points, and extended developments that might be included in a comprehensive grammar. Thus this book does not pretend to completeness of coverage or to a set of inviolable grammatical statements. The fact is that for most if not all of the generalizations that you will meet here, or in any compact grammar, counterexamples are plentiful.

Let us illustrate counterexamples in the area of adjectives. If you point out to your class that one-syllable adjectives are compared with *-er* and *-est*, a dormant figure in the back row is likely to emerge from his or her cocoon long enough to inquire, "What about *mere* and *due*?" If you show that adjectives not compared with *-er* and *-est* will take *more* and *most* as substitutes, someone will call your attention to words like *dental* and *lunar*.

* H. Poutsma, *A Grammar of Late Modern English*, 5 vols. (Groningen, The Netherlands: P. Noordhoff, 1904–1926). Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, 7 vols. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1909–1949). A comprehensive grammar of 1120 pages has appeared in recent years: Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartik, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1972).

If you use the common frame sentence

The _____ (NOUN) is very _____.

as a key to adjectives, you may have to face up to *alone* and *unable*, which do not occupy the first slot, and to *principal* and *olden*, which do not occur in the second one. If, following the usual rule, you say that the position for a single attributive adjective is before, not after, its noun head, the expressions *money necessary* and *something bad* may be cited. If you mention the well-known fact that adjectives are modified by qualifiers like *very*, an enterprising student may remind you of *daily* and *weekly*.

This kind of situation can and should be handled openly and honestly. Students must be made to realize early in the course that a grammatical generalization or rule is a descriptive statement of customary, not universal, usage. If the counterexamples are few, they can be listed as exceptions. If they are numerous and follow a pattern, the rule can be refined. If they are limited to a particular region, to a certain social group, to some trade or profession, or to an age or sex group, they can be assigned to the group that habitually uses them. Thus a class can, by its own observations, elaborate the basic grammar presented here. As a result those who go on to teach English grammar in the schools may be less dogmatic and more respectful of language data, however recalcitrant, than if counterexamples had been ignored or forced into a Procrustean bed.

Definitions also present a problem. A grammar is a closed system, a circle. Wherever one begins in this circle, say at X, it is necessary to use undefined terms. But if one goes back to W to cover these terms, there will be still other terms that need defining. And so one can go backward around the circle until X is reached again. Thus undefined terms are inevitable. In this book I have tried to devise an effective order of presentation with as few undefined terms as possible.

The exposition in this book advances by short-step progression, with an exercise after nearly every step. I have chosen this method because I believe that students must work actively with the language if they are to achieve a firm understanding of it. The exercises are self-corrective, providing students with immediate feedback.

A question may arise here. If the explanations are clear—and I have done my best to make them so—and if the exercises are provided with answers, what is there left for the instructor to do in the classroom? At the risk of expounding the obvious, permit me to mention a few classroom procedures that have been found useful.

1. **Preteach most lessons.** This will hold attention because the material is new. In preteaching it is sometimes valuable to proceed inductively: present examples of a principle to be learned, and by questioning, help your students to formulate the principle for themselves. When a class has successfully groped its way to the understanding of a grammatical principle,

that principle is likely to remain firmly fixed in mind. When your students study the lesson by themselves after preteaching, they will not be intimidated, because they are traversing known and friendly territory.

2. Ask for questions on the text and on the exercises. The answers to the exercises on the phonology in particular will evoke questions, for the student, when asked to write a given word in phonemic script, will sometimes record a pronunciation different from that shown in the answer. This is entirely normal because of the dialectal and idiolectal variations among speakers of English. For example, if you have your students pronounce in turn the word *wash*, they are very likely to produce at least these three pronunciations: /waʃ/, /wɔʃ/, and /wɔrʃ/. Students should be shown at the beginning that all persons do not pronounce English in exactly the same way.

3. During the first unit, on phonology, have daily transcription practice. This will sharpen auditory perception and develop a ready command of the phonemic symbols.

4. Have your class furnish original illustrations of the grammatical concepts presented in the text. The search for and discussion of such illustrations may help to strengthen understanding more than the performance of preshaped exercises.

5. Have your students justify their answers in those exercises which ask for the what but not the why. In this way you can find out which students really understand what they are doing.

6. Give the class short exercises, like those in the book, as a check on comprehension.

N. C. S.

Cedar Falls, Iowa
October 1980

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments can never be made to all those who have nourished one's intellectual life. Chief among these, in my case, are the classroom teachers who have given me sustenance and have kindled the desire for more knowledge, and the linguists from whose books, articles, and monographs I have learned much.

For particular works I owe an especially heavy debt of gratitude to three linguists. Ilse Lehiste's *An Acoustic-Phonetic Study of Internal Open Juncture* furnished the information for my pages on internal open juncture. Archibald A. Hill's chapter on phonotactics in his *Introduction to Linguistic Structures* is the source of my treatment of the distribution of phonemes. James Sledd's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* suggested the pattern for the double-track system of parts of speech that I have adopted.

In addition there are the professional meetings, conference discussions, correspondence and chats with colleagues—all these have furnished grist to the mill: a felicitous example, an apposite phrase, a new insight, a challenging position. These enter into one's intellectual bloodstream and become part of one's being; eventually their origin is lost. For all such, my thanks to the unknown benefactors.

Professor Andrew MacLeish of the University of Minnesota taught parts of the material in prepublication form and offered useful suggestions for improvement. Professor Ralph Goodman, my colleague at the University of Northern Iowa, brought the keen eye of a transformationist to bear on the text and offered valuable criticisms. Professor Frederick G. Cassidy of the University of Wisconsin read the final draft of the first edition with meticulous care and called attention to matters that needed correction or revision. Professors Harold B. Allen of the University of Minnesota and W. Nelson Francis of Brown University read the first draft of the phonology and made thoughtful suggestions that resulted in an improved treatment. Professor Valdon Johnson of the University of Northern Iowa pointed out typos and other errors that he discovered in classroom teaching of the third edition. The Committee on Research at the University of Northern Iowa, under the chairmanship of Professor Gordon Rhum, kindly gave financial assistance for the construction of teaching materials which, after classroom use, were incorporated into this book. To all these scholars I am deeply indebted for their friendly assistance.

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In addition eight professors who used the third edition sent critical comments to the publishers, who forwarded the letters to me while preserving the

anonymity of the writers. Many of these comments were penetrating and relevant and have been incorporated in the present edition. Their names—though I do not know who said what—are as follows: Dorothy Sedley, West Virginia University; John Haskell, Northeastern Illinois University; Michael Haltresht, Corpus Christie State University; Alexandra Olsen, University of Colorado; Ann Johnson, Jacksonville University, Alabama; Janet Sawyer, Long Beach State College; Nancy Brilliant, Kean College; Robert O'Hara, University of South Florida.

Diagrams 6 and 7 have been reprinted with permission of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin from Professor R.-M. S. Heffner's *General Phonetics*, 1950, published by the University of Wisconsin Press. To them and to Professor Heffner I am obliged.

In stressful moments of struggle with a grammatical problem, both student and teacher may receive solace from these words of a great grammarian:

In English the grammarian's path is strewn with scores of insoluble difficulties when he begins to put asunder what nature has joined together into one case; by 'nature' I mean the natural historical development of the English language.

Otto Jespersen,

SPE Tract No. xvi, *Logic and Grammar*, p. 16

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to the Student

At this very moment you have an excellent command of English grammar. This is an operational command that functions below the threshold of awareness. As you speak, you select—with little conscious thought or effort—the precise forms and arrangements of words that signal the meanings you wish to express. The process is almost automatic.

Now you are about to undertake a systematic study of the structure of this language that you handle so easily. Your situation is not unlike that of a skillful automobile driver who is about to begin a course in auto mechanics. But there is this difference: the English language is a machine vastly more complex than the finest car you could buy. And when you have completed this study of your language, you should have a good idea of what makes it go.

As you progress through this book, you will be given exercises at each step along the way. These are necessary and should be done with care, for they will enable you to get a firm grasp of matters that you might otherwise only half learn and quickly forget. The answers to these exercises are in the back of the book. As soon as you have finished each exercise, correct it. If you have made any mistakes, restudy the text to master the points that you did not learn on your first attempt.

There are two dangers for you in this procedure. An exercise may seem

so easy that you will be tempted to do it orally instead of writing it out. This seems harmless enough, but it will exact its penalty later on. Research in programmed learning reveals that students who work orally know as much at the time as those who do the writing; but several months later those who have faithfully written out their work show a higher retention rate.

The second danger is that you may merely use the answers instead of thinking through the exercises for yourself. But you cannot master the complexities of language by only reading about them any more than you can learn to swim by studying a textbook on swimming. You must work actively with the language itself, and this is what the exercises give you a chance to do.

Finally, the material in this course is cumulative. Each day you will build upon what you have previously learned. This means that you must work regularly, not by fits and starts. In the author's classes, to the best of his knowledge, every student who has done his work faithfully has earned a grade of C or better. And many have done exceedingly well. Why not you too?

PART I

**THE
PHONOLOGY
OF
ENGLISH**

1

The Production and Inventory of English Phonemes

A descriptive structural grammar of English progresses upward through three levels of structure. The first or lowest level deals with the system of speech sounds employed by native speakers of English. The study of this level is called *phonology*. The next higher level is concerned with the meaningful forms made from the individual speech sounds. Generally speaking, we may say that it deals with words and their meaningful parts. This is the realm of *morphology*. The top level treats of the ways in which words are arranged to form sentences, and here we are in the area of *syntax*. Hence we begin our study of English grammar at the first level, with a consideration of the speech sounds of English.

At the outset, as we approach our study of English phonology, we must bear in mind two important facts.

First, language itself is ORAL—it lives on the lips and in the ears of its users—and writing is a visual symbolization of language itself. To realize that language is independent of writing, we have only to recall the many tribes, nations, and ethnic groups whose members possess no form of writing but whose LANGUAGES are being avidly studied today by linguistic scientists and anthropologists. When we study the grammar of a language through the medium of writing, as we shall do in this book, we must often supplement the writing with special marks to indicate the stresses, pitches,