

# Grammar for Use

by

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## Foreword

*Grammar for Use* provides the ultimate component in language study for both the advanced ESL student and the native speaker in search of a realistic grammatical standard. With its emphasis on meaning as it relates to form, this text is well within the theoretical framework of Situational Reinforcement, an instructional methodology that is concerned, above all, with the students' ability to communicate in the target language. However, as a basic curriculum of advanced language work, its focus necessarily turns to the syntactic and semantic fine points of English usage as well as to the development of a sophisticated writing style. It is at this advanced stage of language study that we feel it not only appropriate but necessary for the student to be exposed to a grammatical compendium of the facts of English such as that presented in the following pages.

As its name implies, *Grammar for Use* has been designed with actual native-speaker usage in mind. It is a descriptive account of English grammar rather than a prescriptive detailing of what "ought to be." Thus, this text discusses forms and grammatical patterns that may or may not appear in more traditional grammar texts. However, we feel that their inclusion lies very much within the tradition and spirit of SR.

Regarding the text itself, each of the six major sections and most of the 39 chapters deal with a specific grammatical concept. Within each chapter, discussion and description proceed along semantic lines, approaching the subject from the standpoint of "How do we express \_\_\_\_\_ in English?" or "What semantic implications are there in \_\_\_\_\_?" For those teachers familiar with Situational Reinforcement, this text's emphasis on meaning is not new. The philosophy of SR has always been that the primary thrust of language instruction, be it elementary, intermediate or advanced, must be the teaching of *communication*, which in turn necessarily focuses on meaning.

Each text section is followed by a series of questions for "Conversation and Discussion." These ask students to recall many of the grammatical points discussed in the preceding chapter and provide them with an opportunity to compare and contrast the grammar of English with that of their native language. The workbook-like exercises encourage students to use their new language in context by leading them to create original sentences and expand upon those provided while applying the grammatical points of immediate concern.

Although the text was originally designed for use by non-native speakers of American English, native speakers of both standard and nonstandard dialects may profit from it equally well. Due to its emphasis on grammatical usage, this text may be easily integrated into a creative or expository writing course dealing with elementary techniques. In this case, we would suggest that each chapter be used as a means of exploring a particular aspect of English syntax to help students improve their writing style and formally acquaint them with standard American English. After successfully completing an advanced language curriculum based on *Grammar for Use*, both the ESL student and native speaker will have a command of functional grammar sophisticated enough for college work.

Marjorie Frank

## To the Teacher

*Grammar for Use* is designed for "advanced" students—those who have already achieved at least a conversational proficiency in English, whether it is their native language or a second language. Ideally, this book should be their first attempt at a conscious mastery of grammatical statements, as opposed to an unconscious use of the grammatical patterns for the purposes of communication.

Each section consists of three parts. The first part is a summary and explanation of grammatical structures and usages in contemporary American English. Examples of the points under discussion are included.

Following this textual material are questions for comprehension and discussion. They are perhaps even more important than the text itself in attempting to make the students more conscious of the similarities and differences between American English and their native languages, or between standard and non-standard American English. The purpose of many of the questions is to make the students focus on the way in which different concepts and ideas are stated in English.

Finally, exercises follow each group of questions. All the material in the exercises is presented in the form of connected discourse—stories, dialogues, factual readings—rather than in isolated sentences out of context. There are three types of practices:

1. Questions about grammatical points, for the purpose of making the student more conscious of the forms and meanings of the various structures.
2. Manipulations of the sentences for the purpose of making the students more at ease in their use of the forms of the patterns.
3. Exercises principally in combining and otherwise "improving" sentences, for the purpose of making the students more conscious of stylistic devices in English and giving them a basis on which to improve their own skills in communication.

The principal idea in each section of the text has been emphasized in the exercises; particular stress is on the third type of practice, which is the only one that really matters in the mastery of a language for use.

*Eugene J. Hall*

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## **PART ONE: Introduction**

**Language and Experience  
Parts of Speech**





## Chapter 1

### Language and Experience

A grammar is a description of certain organizing aspects of a particular language. It usually includes phonological (sound), morphological (word composition), and syntactic (sentence composition) points. According to the theories of modern linguistics, a grammar for teaching purposes describes the usages of educated speakers of the language, speakers of the "standard" language. The description is carried out by an analysis of the language—by taking apart the various patterns of the language and examining them separately.

"Separately" is the key word in the above sentence. It indicates the difference between a language and the grammar of a language. A language is the synthesis of all the points that are covered in a grammar. A language combines various grammatical points and uses them *together*. There is no conversation or piece of writing, no matter how simple, that does not include a number of different patterns.

Because of this difference between a language and the grammar of a language, it is impossible to learn a language simply by studying its grammar. Studying a grammar helps one to learn *about* a language. Learning about a language is very different from being able to use the language. A grammar should serve as a reference by helping correct deviations from standard usage, and by improving clarity and style. It should be an aid in passing those tests that are created by examiners who believe that a knowledge of grammar is the same thing as a knowledge of the language. For these reasons a grammar—any grammar—should be used by students who have already acquired a good command of and fluency in the language that is being studied. The reason for studying a grammar should be to improve one's formal knowledge of a language. It should be an experience in enrichment.

This particular grammar has its own system of organization. In brief, its major parts are arranged according to the most important parts of English sentences—subject, verb, object, and so on. Within each major part, the various patterns that can be used are discussed. As far as possible, an attempt is made to relate the patterns to the concepts of meaning they signal.

Man has five senses which he uses to understand or perceive his experience: sight, hearing, feeling, smell, and taste. Of these five, sight and hearing are by far the most important. All men have the same senses, and share the same range of experience. There are, of course, differences in environment such as climate and food. An Eskimo and an Indonesian face very different environments. Nevertheless, they both undergo changes in the weather, and they both have to

obtain food and eat it. They have the same senses with which to perceive their surroundings and their experiences, their ideas and their attitudes. The differences between men in one situation and in another are interesting, so they attract our attention. Many people talk and write about them. On the other hand, we tend to take the similarities among all men for granted.

The same thing is true about language. The differences between languages are what we observe. Until recently we did not notice, talk about or study the similarities, except perhaps, the obvious similarities in vocabulary. Yet language is closely tied to man's sensory perception of the world around him. It is produced and heard by everyone with the same sets of muscles and nerves; and it describes the same broad range of experience.

Language is a system of sounds which are produced by our vocal apparatus and received by our auditory apparatus. These sounds which we can control are further arranged into a system of symbols. The symbols themselves represent the things that we comprehend about experience. The ability to perceive depends on the five senses which everyone possesses. It is also limited by them. Sounds are arranged in two ways. First they are arranged into words, which are the smallest independent units of sound that have meaning for us.

*Example:* There are some red flowers on this tree and some white flowers on that one.

I can't keep up with him because he walks so fast.

The purpose of this system of symbols is the exchange of information—that is, communication.

There are several important points to remember about language. (1) The number of combinations in any one language is infinite. (2) New combinations which have never been spoken before can be both generated, or created, and understood by the people who speak a language. Any conversation, any newspaper, any television program, any book contains these new utterances. We can produce and understand them because they are used within a set of linguistic and situational experiences which is comprehensible to us. (3) Language functions at levels that range from the concrete to the abstract. A mother warning her child, *The stove is hot!* is using language in a very definite and practical way. Students discussing political theories are using language in a much more abstract manner. (4) There are approximately two thousand different languages, each using its own sound system, its own vocabulary, and its own grammatical arrangements. Nevertheless, the concepts that are expressed in one language can be expressed in another. Concepts, whether concrete or abstract, represent the experience of mankind, and they are limited. Time, for example, is an experience which is common to all men. However the manner of perceiving it may differ from culture to culture. In some languages, of which English is one, time is expressed both in the grammatical patterns of the language and by individual words. Whatever the arrangement that is used, however, the *concept* of time can be rendered from one language to another. (5) The structure or grammatical patterns of a language convey meanings just as much as individual words do. Patterns are not just collections of words. *I'm sitting down* and *I'm going to sit down* are sentences which use different words *and* have different

meanings. Learning one without the other is of no value at all for the purpose of communication.

This book is going to attempt to look at American English from the point of view of the different concepts which it can express and the forms which are used to express them. It is also going to try to relate the grammatical patterns of the language to those concepts.

### **Conversation and Discussion**

1. What is a grammar of a language? How is a grammar of a language made?
2. What is the difference between a grammar of a language and a language as it is used?
3. What are some reasons for studying a grammar of a language?
4. Why should a grammar be used by advanced students and not by beginners?
5. What are the five senses with which man perceives his experience? Give an example of information that you have received by using each one of these senses.
6. Which senses are the most important to man?
7. Which do you consider more important, the differences between various groups of people or the similarities between them?
8. Give an example of people who come from two different environments. What are the differences between them? What are the similarities between them?
9. What are some differences between your language and English? If there are any similarities, what are they?
10. In what ways are all languages the same?
11. How is language produced? How is it received?
12. Into what are the sounds that make up language arranged?
13. What are words?
14. What does grammar do?
15. What is the purpose of language?
16. How many possible combinations are there in any one language?
17. Why is it possible for someone who speaks a language to generate and understand completely new utterances in that language?
18. Give an example of language functioning at a concrete level.
19. Give an example of language functioning at an abstract level.
20. Approximately how many languages are there in the world today?
21. Why is it possible to render meaning from one language into another?
22. Give an example of a concept in your language that is handled in a different way from the manner that it is handled in English.
23. What do the grammatical patterns of a language convey?

## Thinking and Writing

*Read this paragraph and then answer the questions that follow it.*

1) The campers were sitting around the fire on rough logs. 2) The night air was fragrant with smoke. 3) The flames leaped and danced, changing from blue and orange to pale yellow as they disappeared into the darkness above. 4) The faces of the people who sat around the fire were warm, but their backs were chilled by the wind that filled the air with a piney scent. 5) In the distance was the muted roar of the rushing river as it tumbled through the canyon. 6) The campers sang and laughed as though to push away the silence around them. 7) The only other living sound came from a hooting owl high in a tree. 8) A log fell from the fire with a roar; a shower of sparks rose into the air. 9) One of the campers pulled a marshmallow out of the ashes and bit into it; it was both sweet and smoky.

*Answer these questions. The numbers refer to the numbered sentences in the paragraph above.*

1. a. What sense is used to perceive *rough*?

b. What other word can be made with the same sounds that are used in *rough*? Use that word in a sentence of your own.

2. What sense is used to perceive *fragrant with smoke*?

3. a. What sense is used to perceive *leaped and danced*?

b. What sense is used to perceive *changing from blue and orange to pale yellow*?

c. What sense is used to perceive *disappeared*?

d. What sense is used to perceive *darkness*?

e. What other word can be made with the same sounds that are used in *leap*? Use that word in a sentence of your own.

4. a. What sense is used to perceive *warm*?

- b. What sense is used to perceive *chilled*?
- 
- c. What sense is used to perceive *a piney scent*?
- 
- d. What other words can be made with the same sounds that are used in *scent*? Use one of those words in a sentence of your own.
- 
5. What sense is used to perceive *muted roar*?
- 
6. a. What sense is used to perceive *sang and laughed*?
- 
- b. What sense is used to perceive *the silence*?
- 
7. a. What other word can be made with the same sounds that are used in *came*? Use that word in a sentence of your own.
- 
- b. What sense is used to perceive *hooting owl*?
- 
8. a. What sense is used to perceive *with a roar*?
- 
- b. What sense is used to perceive *a shower of sparks*?
- 
9. What sense is used to perceive *sweet and smoky* as they are used in this sentence?
-

## Chapter 2

### Parts of Speech

Words have traditionally been classified into parts of speech; nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs are the four largest groups. The remaining classifications are essentially function words. They may substitute for words in one of the four largest groups, serve as signals for various patterns, or relate one group of words to another. In English, the functional categories include pronouns and interjections.

No definitions of the parts of speech are very satisfactory. This is particularly true of English, which has few word endings (inflections) that clearly distinguish one class from another. Furthermore, it is possible in English for one word to be used as more than one part of speech.

*Examples:* He sat in the green *chair*. (Noun)  
Mrs. Wilson *chaired* the meeting. (Verb)  
He *steeled* himself to ask his boss for a raise. (Verb)  
*Steel* is made in Pittsburgh. (Noun)  
They keep the equipment in *steel* cabinets. (Adjective)

#### Nouns

At the concrete level of language, nouns are the names given to people and objects: *John, Mary, tree, cave*. Adjectives are used to describe the qualities of nouns: *big John, little Mary, green tree, dark cave*. Verbs describe simple actions: *walk, run, sleep, eat*. Adverbs tell where, when and how an action took place: *outside, yesterday, fast*. Most adverbs in English are not single words, but groups of words: *at school, in the morning, with a smile*. Words for more abstract ideas fall into the same patterns and classifications.

English nouns have no "grammatical gender." They are not arbitrarily classed as masculine, feminine or neuter. Instead, they have "logical gender," in which the gender of the word depends on the gender of the person or object itself. They have singular and plural forms.

*Examples:* boy—boys, woman—women, class—classes, desk—desks.

Nouns are divided into two general groups, *count* and *mass* nouns. These groups are sometimes called *countables* and *non-countables*.

**Examples: Count Nouns**

one book, two books,  
three books, etc.

one day, two days,  
three days, etc.

**Mass Nouns**

water

salt

The mass nouns usually have special uses in which they can be used as count nouns.

**Example:** The *waters* of Lake Erie are drained by the St. Lawrence River.

There are two tests in English to determine whether a word is a noun. First, can one of the personal pronouns be substituted for it?

**Example:** *John* gave the newspaper to the girls.  
He gave it to them.

Second, can it be used with one or more of the determiners (*a, an, the, this, these, that, those, some, any, no*, the possessive adjectives, numbers)?

**Examples:** *That John* is a laugh riot!  
*An oak* loses its leaves in the fall.  
He thought *his reward* was not adequate.  
*One day* is a lot like another.

## Adjectives

Adjectives in English (with the exception of the demonstratives) are not inflected for gender and number. They have no singular and plural forms, and they do not agree with their nouns in gender. (Some adjectives are inflected for the comparative and superlative degrees. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 11.) There are two tests for adjectives in English. First, can it be used before a noun but after a determiner?

**Examples:** *my old* sweater  
*an exciting* movie  
*that red* chair

Second, can it be used in the comparative and superlative degree?

**Examples:** John is *older* than Mary. (Comparative)  
John is *the oldest* boy in the class. (Superlative)  
That book is *more exciting* than this one. (Comparative)  
That's *the most exciting* book I've ever read. (Superlative)

## Verbs

There is only one test for verbs in English. Can the word be conjugated; that is, can it be used with the forms for the different tenses or verb phrases?

**Examples:** He *steels* himself to do his duty.  
He *steeled* himself to do his duty.  
She *walks* slowly.  
She *is walking* slowly.  
She *walked* slowly.



English verbs have three principal parts—the present (the basic form), the past and the past participle. With regular verbs, the past and the past participle are the same. With irregular verbs, all three forms may be different.

*Examples: Regular:* walk walked, walked  
move, moved, moved  
study, studied, studied

*Irregular:* give, gave, given  
put, put, put  
come, came, come

The present participle is formed by adding *-ing* to the present principal part.

*Examples:* walk, walking move, moving  
put, putting give, giving

### Adverbs

There is really no simple test for adverbs. For one thing, they are often expressions rather than individual words; and for another, there are a number of different kinds of adverbs. The most common adverbs are expressions of time, place and manner.

Adverbs of time answer the question *when*.

*Example: When* did you see that movie?  
I saw it *yesterday*.

Adverbs of place answer the question *where*.

*Example: Where* are the children playing?  
They're playing *upstairs*.

Adverbs of manner answer the question *how*.

*Example: How* does he drive?  
He drives *fast*.

### Functional Groups

In addition to the four major classifications of parts of speech, there are also several functional groups.

### Pronouns

Pronouns are traditionally defined as words which take the place of nouns. This is true of the personal pronouns. In fact, the personal pronouns might be said to exist so that awkward repetitions of nouns can be avoided.

*Example:* John was walking down the street when *John* saw Frank, whom *John* had not seen for several weeks.

John was walking down the street when *he* saw Frank, whom *he* had not seen for several weeks.

There are several other classes of pronouns. These include the demonstratives (*this, these, that, those*), reflexives (the *-self* words), indefinite pronouns (the *some-, any-, no-, and every-* words), quantity and number words; the possessive pronouns; and the relative pronouns (*who, which, that, etc.*), which are also connectors.



Pronouns in English are used in the same grammatical slots or places as nouns. They differ from nouns, however, in not usually being preceded by determiners; indeed, many of them *are* determiners which are used as substitutes for nouns phrases. Many grammarians class nouns and pronouns together in one large group called *substantives*.

### Determiners

We have already referred to determiners several times. They are words which precede nouns and place the nouns in various categories. They include the definite and indefinite articles (*the, a, an*) which distinguish between identified and unidentified nouns.

*Examples:* *The* book (that I have been talking about) is on the table.

There is *a* book. (I don't know which book it is) on the table.

The determiners also include the demonstratives (*this, these, that, those*) which relate the noun in space or time to the speaker.

*Examples:* *This* book (which is near me) is red.

*That* book (which is farther away from me) is green.

*This* day (which is not finished yet) has been very pleasant.

*That* day (in the past) was very pleasant too.

Other determiners are the possessive adjectives, the quantity words (*much, little, many, few, etc.*), numbers, the question words (*which, what* and *whose*), *whichever* and *whatever*, the negative *no* and a few others.

*Examples:* *my* book, *his* pencil

*little* time, *many* words

*one* week, *seven* days

*which* book, *whose* book

*whichever* book

*no* time

### Auxiliary Verbs

There are two groups of auxiliary verbs. The first includes the functional auxiliary verbs *be, do, have* and *go*. They are used only to signal a structure, and have no other meaning separate from the verb phrase itself when used as auxiliaries. All of these verbs can also serve as main verbs as well as auxiliaries.

*Examples:* I *do* not understand your question.

We *are going* to visit my uncle.

The second includes the modal auxiliaries *can, may, might, must, should* and so on. These serve both as structural signals and have a meaning of their own. They are never used as main verbs.

*Examples:* We *can* see the zoo some weekday.

*Can* we see the zoo some weekday?

You *shouldn't* try to go there on Sunday.

*Should* we try to go there on Sunday?