

# THE ENGLISH VERB

—ITS GRAMMAR AND USAGE

BY HUANG ZIWEN

黄子文编著

## 英语动词

—语法和惯用法

商务印书馆

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## PREFACE

Grammar being a generalization of usage, a grammar book introducing both grammar and usage will especially be useful to students of English who desire improvement in their studies. The verb is the most important part of, and hence the key to, English grammar, because it gives shape to the sentence and yet its grammar and usage is comparatively complicated. It should therefore be mastered before everything else in grammar. This book is designed to provide information in this respect as a book of study for undergraduates and postgraduates and one of reference for junior teachers. The information supplied may still be fundamental, but the book does impart some basic knowledge of materials which are generally useful, and which may help to understand passages to be found in original works of grammar by Western authors when reference to these is required.

By way of acknowledgement, the compiler must mention the following works, from which he has often obtained suggestive ideas and drawn useful materials in compiling the present book:

- C.E. Eckersley and J.M. Eckersley (1961): A Comprehensive English Grammar for Foreign Students
- A.S. Hornby (1957): A Guide to Patterns and Usage in English
- John Millington-Ward (1955): The Use of Tenses in English

Frederick T. Wood (1973): English Verbal Idioms  
Frederick T. Wood (1962): Current English Usage  
Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and  
Jan Svartvik (1973): A Grammar of Contemporary  
English

Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik(1974): A Communicative  
Grammar of English

H.W. Fowler (1965): A Dictionary of Modern English  
Usage

H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler (1930): The King's English

J.C. Nesfield (1929): Idiom, Grammar & Synthesis for High  
Schools, Book IV

W. McMordie (1957): English Idioms and How to Use  
Them

The compiler has also had the pleasure of referring to the  
following productions in Chinese by domestic writers of grammar,  
the titles in English being original ones except that of the first  
book, which is a translation by the compiler:

Zhang Dao Zhen (张道真) (1962): Practical English Gram-  
mar (Revised Edition)

Bao Bing (薄冰) (1977): A Handbook of English Grammar  
(Revised Edition)

The Foreign Languages Department of Xiamen University  
(1978): A New Elementary English Grammar

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is a process of usage, which is changing forever. It is the work of usage. Grammar generalizes usage by deducing some rules, which are meant not to prescribe, but to guide. Where usage predominates, grammar complies. When usage changes, grammar is revised to account for the new usage. Grammar is thus not a set of dead rules, but merely some temporary guiding principles, which are to be valid for the time being. In the short run, therefore, grammar does serve to teach one how to write and speak conformably to usage. The compiler is ever of opinion that grammar should be taught with especial reference to usage.

It is the verb that forms the frame of an English sentence. The verb is the most important part of English grammar. And existing books on grammar do devote a considerable portion of space to its treatment. The grammar about the English verb usually covers such topics as kinds of verbs, tense, mood, voice and the non-finites. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the inclusion, but the way of treatment remains to be improved upon. The chief weakness common to many grammar books lies perhaps in the fact that too little emphasis has been laid on usage.

With the little experience accumulated in teaching English for years, the compiler is now able to present this book for the guidance of students of English. It is true that except for the addition of a final chapter "Verbs and Their Prepositions", the

book apparently contains the same topics as any other grammar book does in the section on the verb. Yet grammar is treated here side by side with usage, which can thus be kept in view amidst grammatical rules. One can find a wealth of reliable information here most readily.

A brief introduction to the ways of treatment adopted in each chapter is given below.

Current grammar books do touch upon the transitive verb, the intransitive verb and the linking verb, but with rather insufficient reference to the direct object, the indirect object and the object complement. These are treated rather briefly without due regard to usage. But they are points where usage counts so much. As a matter of fact, there are five basic types of the English verb, which determine the five basic types of the sentence. The importance of the types cannot, therefore, be over-emphasized. In this book, the types are set out by ample examples in logical order and treated in detail with reference to usage.

In the chapter on tense, special emphasis is laid on the distinction between time and tense — a point often passed over in grammar books. Time is something of the objective world, and we have the present time, the past time and the future time. Tense is a grammatical term, the various tense forms being used to refer to certain different times. Each tense form is given its basic meaning first so as to show why it has been so called, and then its extended meaning or meanings. Next, a time standard is put up, and different tense forms that may apply to it are enumerated and discussed with reference to it. Finally, different tense forms are compared again in sentences of similar wording to show different situations. The purpose of repetitive treat-

ment is to drive home the use of a tense form.

Most books treat the auxiliary verbs, modal verbs and the notional verbs "be" and "have" separately. They are closely related, though. They are all special (or, anomalous) verbs; they have one thing in common, i.e., being special in forming the negative and the interrogative and in some other minor respects. It is all usage. In this book they are treated as one single group—special verbs—and their common peculiarities are illustrated extensively. As modal verbs express the emotions or moods of the speaker, they are treated not one by one, but under a certain typical emotion, which will be shown to be often expressible by more than one modal. A discussion is also made of what are called semi-modal verbs.

Many grammar books deal with the passive voice rather mechanically. They teach more about the conversion (from active into passive, and *vice versa*) than about the usage. Now, the passive sentence and the active sentence are not exactly of the same meaning. In the passive, the original object has become the subject and is therefore more emphatic and important than the original subject. The relative importance of the subject and the object determines the use of the one or the other voice. This is why some verbs particularly lend themselves to the passive and others always demand the active. In this book, ample examples are supplied both ways. Besides, verbs which are active in form but passive in meaning, either in the finites or in the non-finites, are also pointed out and illustrated. As to the conversion itself, it is not limited to transitive verbs only, but the illustration goes on to phrasal verbs as well. Besides, all kinds of objects including the noun clause are taken care of in conversion.

The subjunctive mood has been dealt with rather unsatisfactorily in many grammar books. A definition is usually given first, and followed up by a miscellany of illustrations many of which do not bear out the definition. What is more, use of modal verbs is wrongly regarded as the subjunctive mood. So the description is bound to be confusing. The compiler has analysed the situation and tried to clarify the point by classifying the so-called subjunctive mood of that nature into four types (the pure subjunctive, the half subjunctive, the old-styled subjunctive and the false subjunctive) by way of illustration as well as comment.

The non-finites are treated in grammar books one by one. But since all of them may take up the position of a sentence element with a fixed grammatical function, it is advisable to compare them together under each particular function (say, adverbial, attributive, subject or object). This is what has been done by the compiler in the present book. It is also important to set out the differences between the finite and the non-finite. Other points are featured too, such as agent reference, time reference, voice reference, the peculiarity of the attributive and the predicative present participle, the peculiarity of the intransitive past participle, the relation with the adverbial clause, the relation with the relative clause, the split infinitive, the bare infinitive, the elliptical infinitive, the half gerund—most of which have been so meagrely described, if at all, in other books on grammar.

Prepositions constitute a separate chapter in a general grammar book and are usually treated there one by one. But since the verb has usually a great deal to do with the preposition, a book on the grammar and usage of the English verb, such as the