

The book cover features an abstract background with a dark, textured vertical band on the left and a lighter, textured area on the right. The title is printed in a large, outlined, sans-serif font, and the author's name is in a smaller, solid, sans-serif font.

# A SURVEY OF MODERN GRAMMARS

SECOND EDITION

**JEANNE H. HERNDON**

**A Survey of**  
**MODERN**  
**GRAMMARS**  
**SECOND EDITION**

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## PREFACE

This handbook is intended for those who would like to know something of the findings of linguistic scholarship—especially with regard to the workings of the grammar of the English language—without necessarily wishing to become accomplished linguists themselves. The primary audience is presumed to be in-service and preservice elementary and secondary teachers of the language arts or English, but it is my sincere belief that any intelligent speaker of English will find added insight into the workings of the language in these pages.

I have written as simply as it is possible for me to write and have used very little of the enormously fascinating, but frustratingly complex, detail of scholarly introductions to linguistic investigation and theory. Whenever linguistic terminology has been used, a careful attempt has been made to define terms and explain concepts as clearly as possible. A great many terms to be found in linguistics texts have been eliminated here because it was felt that they could be safely omitted without serious detriment to an overall grasp of the principles involved. Those unfamiliar terms that remain are not pure linguistic lingo. They are terms coined for new concepts in language study, and they have no counterparts in traditional terminology.

The field of language study, like most other areas of intellectual inquiry, has seen a virtual information explosion over the past several decades. Some of this information represents profoundly intelligent and important investigation into the communicative skills of man; some of it is pure hogwash. School boards, administrators, and faculties are inundated with “new English” textbooks and teaching materials, most of which claim to be based on linguistics. Many are well-planned, well-written, and quite effective in the hands of competent teachers; others have little to recommend them beyond the word *linguistic* in their sales brochures.

No effort is made here to judge between the worthwhile and the spurious. It seemed more realistic to attempt to place enough information in the hands of intelligent teachers, parents, and school administrators to give them some basis for making their own judgments. My primary goal has been to give teachers some of the background necessary for them to use the best of the new materials as effectively as possible, for it is my absolutely unshakable conviction that the fundamental processes in education are still firmly in the hands of teachers. Modern, well-equipped buildings, well-written, colorfully illustrated texts, elaborate audiovisual equipment, and complex teaching machines can help

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competent, dedicated teachers enormously; these things will never replace teachers.

This handbook began as a series of study guides for those in-service and preservice teachers who were students in my Modern Grammars classes. The students were expected to make use of the more complete works available on the history of the language and linguistic study—traditional, structural, and transformational-generative grammar. These works, primarily written for beginning students in linguistics, or made up of articles reprinted from linguistics journals, often assumed a knowledge of terminology and method that most students simply did not have. Those who were approaching this material for the first time were unable to see the beauties of the linguistic forest because they were surrounded by towering trees of unfamiliar detail. The attempt here has been to provide a mile-high view of the terrain; as a result, much of the detail is lost. The Suggested Reading included at the end of the book might, therefore, better be called Strongly Urged Reading. All should be a part of every English Department faculty library. In choosing these readings, I have made an attempt to list those works that combine scholarly values with some degree of accessibility for the beginner. A few, such as Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, qualify much more strongly on the former count than on the latter, but have been included here because of their profound influence on the work of others. This handbook is intended to provide a grasp of broad outlines, a frame of reference, from which the more detailed and specific information may be considered and assimilated.

Linguists and teachers alike must realize that the teaching of English grammar in the schools is in a transition period that is confusing to both teachers and students. At the moment, teachers of English grammar cannot do full justice to their students without a thorough knowledge of traditional, structural, and transformational-generative approaches to the problems of analyzing the grammar of the English language. New textbooks show a variety of emphases, and many of the best are combinations of whatever the writer finds most useful in each of the three approaches. Because of the constantly shifting nature of our population, a single English class is apt to be made up of students who have a bewildering variety of previous training in English grammar. A teacher must be prepared to alienate students by telling them to forget everything they have learned before and begin again, or be prepared to see and explain some connecting links between what they have learned and what they must now cope with. The latter course is easier on both students and teacher, but it can only be accomplished by a teacher who has knowledge of a variety of approaches to the problems of English grammar.

Trained linguists will find much to lament in the omissions made here. They are, quite properly, proud of the great strides made in their

field and feel that justification of their findings should be based only on the enormous amount of detailed study that supports these findings. We must agree with them that a teacher whose background includes thorough training in linguistics is a better teacher of the language arts. But the overwhelming demands on a teacher's time and energy must also be recognized. Many teachers who teach the language arts must also teach history, geography, literature, art, music, mathematics, and elementary science. In addition they must put in several hours a week in pursuit of such nonscholarly occupations as "yard duty," attending faculty or Parents Club meetings, filling out the interminable forms required by this or that urgent school regulation, wiping noses, and instilling respect for the rights of others into the minds and hearts of their charges. While recognizing that linguistic research is a fascinating field, their most urgent concern is, understandably, how all this information can be reframed to elicit interest from the ten-year-old who evinces more concern for a ball of lint extracted from a jacket pocket than for the workings of auxiliary verbs or the wondrously humanistic values to be found in consideration of innate communicative skills.

Clearly, some bridges need to be built. This handbook is, then, an attempt at bridge-building.

## **A SECOND-EDITION POSTSCRIPT TO THE PREFACE**

The intent and focus of the second edition remain the same as those of the first, but the content of the book is different in several significant ways.

The section on transformational-generative grammar has been completely rewritten to reflect the tremendous amount of research and development in that field. Revisions in transformational-generative theory have been frequent and far-reaching over the past ten years. Research, publications, and teaching materials based on succeeding stages in this development can be confusing to anyone who has not followed the developments closely. For this reason, the present transformational-generative grammar section begins with a review of why and how the theory has evolved and changed. Then, Chapters 10 through 14 cover the several points of the theory that are now generally accepted. Areas of current research and possible future developments are also discussed.

Other changes in the second edition are responses to specific needs expressed by those who have used the book. A completely new section recommends methods of dealing with the most frequently expressed problem, that of adapting complex linguistics materials for use with ele-

mentary and secondary students. I have not attempted to create lesson plans based on linguistics, but to present materials that should encourage teachers to create plans for their particular students. I have tried, with the help of many students and several able teachers, to focus on some of the basic problems that students have in using their language, and then suggested ways that linguistics findings can help both students and teachers to cope with those problems.

Aside from these two major changes, the book is now much richer in examples than its predecessor. The original attempt to outline, as briefly as possible, the basic points of traditional, structural, and transformational-generative descriptions of English was too miserly with examples. The present edition responds to those students and teachers who felt that more examples would help to clarify definitions throughout the book. Indeed, most of the best examples were contributed by students. With their help, I believe our bridge is much more solidly built than before.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have read all or part of this manuscript and have offered helpful suggestions for its improvement. I owe a great debt of gratitude to each of them. Any attempt to simplify tremendously complex material is most susceptible to the dangers of oversimplification. Thurston Womack of San Francisco State College fished me out of several such pitfalls, and Samuel Levin of Hunter College caught still other errors and misleading generalizations. Margaret Nearing of the Sacramento City College English Department contributed much to whatever understanding I possess of the problems of classroom teachers. This book owes a great deal to her straightforwardness, her total lack of pedagogical pomposity, and her kind encouragement. Among the elementary and secondary teachers who brought their classroom experience to a consideration of the manuscript and helped me to understand the audience I hope to reach were Gladys Baldwin, Katherine Blickhahn, Patrick F. Skinner, and Mary Ungersma. Many other teachers and soon-to-be teachers, who were students in my Modern Grammars classes at Dominican College and were, therefore, a practical proving ground for the early stages of the manuscript, contributed more than they know. They were so intent upon understanding what I told them—as opposed to just listening and taking notes to memorize—that they asked questions and pursued points until I was forced to frame my explanations as clearly and understandably as it was possible for me to do.

The second edition owes several special debts of gratitude. Among

those who read all or part of the revised manuscript, and provided much help, were Professors Diane Bornstein, Queens College; Robert J. Bousquet, Rider College; M. A. Grellner, Rhode Island College; George Hammerbacher, King's College; Francis A. Simonetti, Rhode Island College; Richard M. Trask, Frostburg State College; and John A. Walter, The University of Texas at Austin. Ruth Canobi was especially helpful in the early stages, reading through two successive revisions of the transformational-generative grammar section and playing devil's advocate page by page. William R. McMunn contributed a healthy sheaf of valuable criticism and—even more valuable—suggestions for how to handle some of the knottier problems of transformational-generative grammar. English classes at Sir Francis Drake High School were “loaned” to me for successive six-week periods by Carol MacKay and Elaine Grinnell Johnson so that we could experiment with the materials in Chapter 19. Both were generous with their time in preparing me for their students, and Ms. Johnson audited all the classes with her students, took copious notes, and provided helpful suggestions. Patrick Skinner adapted the materials, taught them himself at Terra Linda High School, and shared the results. Students at Dominican, at Oregon State University, and at the high schools were, again, my favorite proving ground. All of these kind people weeded heroically, and are hereby absolved of guilt for the mistakes that remain.

Finally, there is my remarkable family, whose contributions are impossible to itemize or define. I cannot dedicate the book to Chuck, Mike, and Larna; it is, in a very real sense, as much theirs as it is mine.

J.H.H.

Kansas City, Missouri  
December 1975



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## **PART ONE**

# **Contexts for the Study of Modern Grammars**



# Some Basic Considerations

As you read these words and understand them, you are doing something that has never been fully explained. This book is about the efforts of a great many people—over a period of about 2,000 years—to figure out what is going on in your head at this moment. There are whole libraries full of the results of all that effort, giant computers are programmed with masses of information, and still there are disagreements, conflicting ideas, and no definitions or descriptions that go unchallenged. This can be a cause for great dismay, or a cause for great wonder—that the human mind operates in such complex ways that this inner universe is no more completely understood than is the outer one.

All evidence on the subject of human language abilities points to these basic facts:

People talk. They communicate their thoughts and experience, their hopes and fears to others; they transmit their accumulated knowledge and beliefs to their children, by means of oral sounds. Others listen and comprehend. These facts are true of all communities of human beings, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated.

There are, of course, other means of communication. Hand signals, shrugs, nods, marks on paper, electrical dots and dashes, and smoke signals are a few of these. But the sounds made by the human vocal equipment are basic;

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the sounds and the patterns we form with them are the raw materials of language.

Each language community has a set of mutually agreed upon methods for stringing together its sounds so that when one member of the group speaks, another can be expected to understand what is said. Of the more than 3,000 languages known to exist in the world, only a comparative few have a written form of the language. Those that have no written form have, nevertheless, a grammatical system that is quite as complex as our own—all human languages seem to operate within the confines of certain universals of grammatical structure. The fact that a language has a written form does not necessarily mean that its grammatical system is superior to the grammatical system of a language that has no written form. If a language is sufficient to the needs of those who use it, it is unrealistic to judge it by other standards.

What is in the mind of man that enables him to organize his experience and thoughts into communicable form? No one knows. We only know that he does. And the organization is done in ways that are so highly complex that this ability alone sets mankind completely apart from all other life forms.

We do not know what is at the root of this ability, but its branches are all around us. We can take them apart and study them, classify them, compare them, theorize about them, and try to understand them.

The system of organization of any language is the **grammar** of that language. Various means may be used to analyze and sort out the grammar or system of human languages. The variety of analyses is based on the fact that every human language has a grammar that is a complex of interlocking systems:

1. Each language has its own set of sounds.
2. Each has its own system of combining those sounds.
3. Each has its own set of arbitrarily agreed upon meanings assigned to various sound combinations.
4. Each has its own system of patterns for combining the meaning units.

All of the systems operate concurrently in any given communicative exchange. In order to understand and describe how language works, it is necessary to break these systems down into some manageable parts. Anatomists studying the human body do the same kind of thing when they divide their study into nervous system, circulatory system, muscular structure, skeleton, and so on. Both linguists and anatomists must remember that none of the "parts" really works independently.

Most Americans are familiar with a grammatical analysis of English that is based on methods originated over 2,000 years ago. While it has the weight

of all those years of scholarship behind it, the fact is that traditional means of grammatical analysis were developed to analyze classical Greek and Latin—both of which are quite different from modern English in several important ways. The analysis begins with meaning units and ways of combining them, and the categories and definitions that applied to Greek and Latin simply did not transfer easily to English.

In recent years, scholars have leaped into the stream of language at different points—the structuralists begin with the sound system and the transformationalists with sentence patterns—in an attempt to understand languages. These means, applied to the study of English, have been further adapted to serve as educational materials in the elementary and secondary schools.

The objectives of this book are

1. An attempt to compare and contrast all these methods, not so much in an effort to choose “the best” as to understand the basic similarities and differences and to point out the strengths and weaknesses of each.
2. To see what light each throws on the workings of Standard American English and how these methods can be used to teach the language arts to elementary and secondary school students.

It is important that we grasp from the outset that these two specific areas of interest—that is, the interests of linguistic scholars and the interests of teachers—exist side by side in the general field of language study.

Linguistic scholars engage in a study of our ability to communicate and the means we employ to that end *for its own sake*. The roots of this study are found in the basic philosophical quest into the nature of knowledge itself. How do we know what we know? How do we organize our experience? How do we communicate with others? This study is sufficient unto itself for most modern linguistic scholars.

The teacher of English deals with the more immediate task of applying the findings of the language scholars to the training of the young in more effective and more efficient use of their innate language gifts. Linguistic scholars are interested in the teacher’s task—as they are interested in all facts of language and its use—but for the language scholars it does not loom so large in importance. The teachers are, by the same token, interested in language study, but only as one facet of their primary function, which is to help students learn.

The linguistic scholars bear a relationship to teachers of English that is analogous to the relationship of the research scientist to the general practitioner of medicine. One seeks information; the other seeks to apply that information to the more efficient handling of specific problems.

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In order to compare and contrast various methods used to analyze the grammar of the English language, it is best to look into the work of both the linguistic scholar and the English teacher. The orientation of each, the objectives, methods, and problems of each, must be kept in mind at every stage of the inquiry.

Ideally, those who wish to gain something worthwhile from a comparative study of this kind should have a background that includes:

1. A working knowledge of anthropology
2. Fluency in one or two languages other than English
3. A course in the history of the English language
4. Some knowledge of the history of linguistic study as it has developed over the past 2,000 years

This ideal set of qualifications rarely exists. If we examine what each of these areas of study can contribute to an understanding of modern linguistics, perhaps means can be found to fill in some of the gaps.

1. Anthropology, according to the *American College Dictionary*, is "the science that treats of the origin, development (physical, intellectual, moral, etc.), and varieties, and sometimes especially the cultural development, customs, beliefs, etc., of mankind." Such a study would provide, as nothing else could, a broad awareness of the fact that all people may look out upon the same world but that they do not view that world from the same window. The differences that exist in the highly varied interpretations of what is seen from all those other windows can be contrasted for a far better understanding of our own. English, for example, is a noun-centered language. Names of things are our subject matter. Without debating whether our world view determines our language or vice versa, it does seem evident that English speakers see the universe as a tremendous collection of things that act upon and react to each other. Benjamin Lee Whorf, Edward Sapir, and other anthropologists have pointed out that some American Indians have a very different view of the universe reflected in their languages. These languages are verb-centered and speak of motion and process—birth, life, death, decay—and forces of nature that affect objects and people as they pass. Languages can tell us many things about the people who speak them.

2. A knowledge of another language or languages is of prime importance. No collection of random examples can serve to point out how very different various languages are in their structure. Knowledge of two or more complete systems, even though the languages may be closely related, makes differences of grammatical structure a part of the student's awareness—not something he must be persuaded to believe. One example is to be found in the Latin and English verb charts on page 189. Latin makes distinctions of person, tense, number, mood, and so on, by means of large sets of inflectional

endings added to verb stems. English makes the same kinds of distinctions by use of a few inflections, some auxiliary verbs, and modal forms such as *shall* and *may*. The chart makes it clear that the verb forms in the two languages cannot be equated beyond a certain point.

3. It is most important that the student know something of the ways in which English developed. Students of the structure of modern English should know that English began with the Germanic dialects brought to the British islands 1,500 years ago. They should know something of the major influences of Latin and French, and of the minor influences of the Celtic and Scandinavian languages. They should know of the rapid changes in the structure of the language during the two centuries following the Norman Conquest, when French was the language of the upper classes and of written records in England while English survived primarily as a spoken language, and some of the changes brought about by other political, economic, and social factors. They should know, too, the conditions under which the traditional rules of "correctness" were established for the Standard British English and Standard American English of today. In addition to the wealth of information this provides about our own language, it demonstrates most vividly the fact that any language spoken by living people may also be recognized as a "living" thing. Living things, by their very nature, change—and language is no exception.

4. Finally, those who know something of the history of linguistic study will be aware of the basis for traditional methods and objectives of language analysis. They will be better able to compare these methods and objectives with those of modern linguistic analysis. Mere knowledge of the rules of traditional grammar is not enough. Students need to know what lies behind those rules—who established them and how and why—before they can make an intelligent comparison with modern approaches. This knowledge of the history of linguistic study will also provide an awareness that the application of scientific method to the investigation of how languages grow, develop, and work is not new, but has a foundation of respected scholarship that stretches back over the past two centuries. The "New English" is new only to the elementary and secondary schools.

It would be impossible to summarize the entire field of anthropology in these pages, and we cannot include a crash course in French or Hopi or Japanese. We can attempt to summarize some of the key facts about the history and development of the English language and about the field of language study. These chapters will serve the double purpose of introducing some much-needed background material and getting some of the terminology defined.

The English language is enormously complex, flexible, and creative. It is not surprising that there are many ways to approach a description of how it works. Most of those engaged in the grammatical analysis of English are



willing to admit that problems arise no matter which approach is followed. Those who write school textbooks have found that each approach has merit, and many adopt whatever appears to be most useful from each of the major approaches to the problem of describing English grammar.

These major approaches, the traditional, structural, and transformational, are quite different in some respects, quite similar in others. An evaluation of school materials that may borrow freely from all three should be based on some knowledge of each method on its own terms. For this reason, other chapters of this book will consider the methods and results of traditional, structural, and transformational grammarians separately.

Later chapters will be devoted to some aspects of applied linguistics—dialect study, usage and rhetoric, and classroom use of linguistics findings.