

MODERN AMERICAN GRAMMAR and USAGE

J. N. HOOK

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

E. G. MATHEWS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

PREFACE

Modern American Grammar and Usage is a textbook for college classes and a guide for the general reader interested in American English. In planning and writing this book, the authors have drawn heavily upon their own experience of the specific needs of students in grammar, syntax, and usage. They believe that intelligent laymen as well as teachers in training and other students in courses labeled "College Grammar," "Advanced Grammar," and the like will find the book an aid to comprehension of some of the idiosyncrasies of our language and a spur to fresh interest in that most *humane* of the humanities, the way of a man with a word.

A new book on language should state its point of view, its aims, its assumptions, and its methods. If the student is clear on these points, his study of the book may be much more illuminating than it would otherwise be. The authors regard this book as a practical instrument. Years of teaching have convinced them that most college students who take courses in grammar and usage want not only some scientific understanding of the language, but also some practical helps to their own writing and speaking, especially in situations that demand formality. *Modern American Grammar and Usage*, then, takes account of that fact. At the same time, the authors offer a description of the language as it is. They do not rehash other books of grammar but base their presentation upon an inductive study of the language currently in use. Information about the history of the language is included solely to shed light upon present structure and usage.

Unlike most modern grammars, this book concentrates upon the printed rather than the spoken word. This concen-

tration does not imply any lack of respect for the splendid work of the structural linguists, who deal mainly with the spoken language. Students can be keenly interested in an analysis of spoken English, and they can certainly learn many linguistic truths from such analysis. But as stated before, the authors have assumed, from long observation, that students want and need guidance in their own expression and, for this purpose, can make direct use of a study of the written forms.

The authors' procedures were as follows: Fifty nonfiction passages of about one thousand words each, from American newspapers, magazines, and books—all printed between 1945 and 1953—supplied the basic data on morphology and syntax. Obviously trashy material was excluded, but the range is from *Collier's* to *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (see Bibliography A). Each of these fifty passages was analyzed word by word, phrase by phrase, clause by clause, sentence by sentence. So far as possible, the commonly accepted notions of grammar were set aside for the sake of classifying this material without prejudice. In addition, sixty-two longer selections, each of about ten thousand words (see Bibliography B), provided supplementary information about actual modern practices in usage, supplying evidence about such long-debated matters as the split infinitive and the terminal preposition.

The book that has resulted from these inductive procedures is probably least traditional in its description of sentence patterns. The study revealed a much simpler and hence more satisfactory way of explaining modern American English sentence structure than ordinarily appears in books of this sort. This explanation appears in Chapter 3 and is supplemented by Chapters 4, 5, and 6 and parts of other chapters. In the chapters on the parts of speech, or form classes, it seemed desirable to follow a somewhat rigid plan of organization. Often a little information about historical background can aid understanding of present practices; hence each of these chap-

Preface

ters begins with some historical notes, a few of them admittedly conjectural. Then follows an analysis of the uses of the parts of speech today, and last comes a discussion of usage, with emphasis upon trouble spots.

The exercises, grouped in the back of the book, are planned to require both synthesis and analysis. That is, students are asked to construct sentences of their own, using designated patterns and forms, and also to discuss in detail many sentences composed by modern professional writers. Since many users of the book are likely to be rather advanced students, material is offered to challenge the most able. There are also many "easier" exercises and examples that the comparatively untrained student may find most profitable. The authors have not hesitated to include numerous sentences for which conflicting grammatical analyses may be defended.

Thanks are due to so many hundreds of persons that it is impossible to list individuals. The authors owe their greatest debt, of course, to the many scholars who during the past century have been contributing steadily to increasing our understanding of the details of our fascinating language.

J. N. HOOK
E. G. MATHEWS

Urbana, Illinois
January, 1956

Copyright, ©, 1956, by
THE RONALD PRESS COMPANY

All Rights Reserved

The text of this publication or any part thereof may not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing from the publisher.

3

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56-6265

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1 THE BACKGROUND OF MODERN AMERICAN ENGLISH	3
2 SOME QUESTIONABLE OPINIONS	47
3 MAJOR PATTERNS OF THE ENGLISH SENTENCE	76
4 THE MINOR SENTENCE PATTERNS AND NONSENTENCES	95
5 SUBORDINATION AND THE PLACEMENT OF MODIFIERS	110
6 THE PATTERNS OF DEPENDENT CLAUSES	126
7 NOUNS	140
8 SUBSTITUTES FOR NOUNS	167
9 VERBS	191
10 ADJECTIVES	251
11 ADVERBS	284
12 PREPOSITIONS	310
13 CONJUNCTIONS	332
14 INTERJECTIONS	355
BIBLIOGRAPHY	357
EXERCISES	363
INDEX OF WORDS	457
INDEX OF SUBJECTS	467

Chapter I

THE BACKGROUND OF MODERN AMERICAN ENGLISH

EARLY ANCESTORS

Guesses Concerning the Origin of Language

"Perhaps of all the creations of man language is the most astounding," Lytton Strachey once wrote. But how was it created? The puzzle of this *how* has long fascinated man, and maybe we are no nearer its solution than was the first person who ever wondered, "What is the source of the words that I utter? What man spoke the first word, and why? When and how did human beings first assemble two or more words to create a statement of a complex thought?"

On the ground that it will never be possible to prove, as in a laboratory, exactly how languages originated and evolved, most modern linguists have adopted the fashion of ridiculing all attempts at explanation. In defense of such attempts, however, Stuart Robertson and Frederic Cassidy have declared, "If [the linguistic scientist] gains nothing absolute, at least he dismisses untenable theories and keeps the question alive. . . . Thus while it is right to reject premature solutions, it is 'decidedly wrong to put the question out of court altogether'—as some recent linguists have tended to do."¹

¹ *The Development of Modern English* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), p. 8.

The speculations may suggest significant ideas about language. If, for example, we speculate that man's early language was like that of animals, we may discover in man's development of language, or in the excellence of his sound-making mechanism, a basic cause of his total development.* The lower animals did not acquire the ability to compose sentences; man did. The lower animals did not learn to relate their history or even the immediate past events in the lives of individuals; man did. The lower animals did not transmit elaborate information from one to another; man did. The ability to transmit historical and other information is responsible for many of the discoveries and most of the inventions made by man. Our original speculation has now led us to the idea that much of man's "progress," most of the achievements that help to differentiate him from the lower animals, may be attributed to his having developed language far beyond that of the wolf, the horse, or the monkey.

According to anthropologists, "The apes lack true language and possess only a large inventory of interjections, ejaculations, and other simple signals or emotional cries, whereas man's possession of language has given him the power to devise a culture and has thus enabled him to utilize his environment more effectively for his own ends."²

Early attempts to determine the origin of language include such an experiment as the fantastic one of the Egyptian king Psammetichos, who kept an infant isolated in order to discover whether the first word spoken by the untutored child would be Egyptian or Phrygian; his theory was that the child would thus prove whether Egyptian or Phrygian was man's earliest language. Plato, in *Cratylus*, expressed the naïve belief that there once was a natural, inevitably right, divinely given name for everything in the universe, but that man had forgotten this original perfect language and must seek it anew.

² Melville Jacobs and Bernhard J. Stern, *General Anthropology* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1952), p. 15.

The Old Testament, in the account of Creation, depicts Adam as a man who could understand the words of the Lord, and who himself gave names to "every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; . . . whatever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." Eve was able to converse with the serpent. In the time of the descendants of Adam and Eve, some centuries after the flood, "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech." But when men presumptuously began building the tower of Babel, "the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth." Today's linguists, and theologians as well, tend to accept the Old Testament explanation as figurative; belief in one common ancestral language is not widely held. In the Middle Ages, however, theologians debated vigorously the question of whether language was originated by God or by man, and they thought almost always in terms of one basic language from which all others evolved. However, one of the most "modern" of these theologians, Gregory of Nyssa, argued that God had granted man the power to speak and write, but that man had devised the grammar and orthography to suit himself.

In the eighteenth century Jean Jacques Rousseau, in some of his less lucid moments, portrayed his idealized primitive men as sitting down, presumably around a conference table, and reaching an agreement (a social contract?) saying that certain sounds should represent certain meanings. The less said of Rousseau as a writer on linguistics, the better. Much more intelligent were the conclusions of Johann Gottfried Herder, who in 1772 wrote a prize essay on the *Origin of Language*. Herder argued that language was man-made, not God-given, asserting that a language prepared by the Deity would have none of the weaknesses existing in all known languages. Man was sufficiently more intelligent than animals that he simply had to find ways to express his more complex observations and reactions. It was man's understanding, Herder believed, that

made possible his language. Although man was less strong and less keen in his senses than were some of the animals, the quality of his mind made him immeasurably superior to them, and this quality was especially well revealed in his language.

Linguists of the nineteenth century and of the early twentieth constructed a number of more or less ingenious theories, all of which it is now stylish to ridicule, even though some of them may contain fragments of the truth. The theory of imitation, called the "bow-wow" theory by its derogators, said that man named things according to the sounds they made or, according to sounds they suggested. It is certainly true that many words are onomatopoeic: *bang*, *crash*, *sizzle*, *purr*, and dozens of others are examples in English. Moreover, as Otto Jespersen has pointed out, imitative words may be the source of additional words; the French *cocorico* (English *cockadoodledoo*) is the source of French words *cocu*, *coquet*, *coquetterie*, *cocart*, *cocarde*, *coquelicot*. Many ordinary words in every language, however, cannot readily be squared with the theory of imitation; e.g., *the*, *bird*, *walk*, and.

Another theory, nicknamed "pooh-pooh," holds that language is derived from interjections. Some of its proponents follow the Darwinian theory that interjections are of physiological origin. Thus, when one is startled or astonished, he feels a need to be ready for exertion; this need causes him to draw a quick breath. Darwin goes on, "When the next full expiration follows, the mouth is slightly closed, and the lips, from causes hereafter to be discussed, are somewhat protruded; and this form of the mouth, if the voice be at all exerted, produces . . . the sound of the vowel *o*. Certainly a deep sound of a prolonged *oh* may be heard from a whole crowd of people immediately after witnessing any astonishing spectacle." In other places, convention may modify the sound to *ah*, *ach*, *ai*, *au*, *aus*, or *ahi*. The interjectional theory, however, would appear to account for even fewer words than the imitative theory does.

Other theories include the "yo-he-ho," the "ding-dong," and the "huff-puff." The first of these says that men, working together, would automatically make certain sounds—grunts, perhaps; these sounds then became the names of the varied activities. The "ding-dong" theory, which its inventor, Max Müller, later renounced, is somewhat Platonic; it says that for everything in existence there is a natural sound, which rings in harmony with that which it names: "every impression from without received its vocal expression from within." The "huff-puff" theory was offered by Professor F. N. Scott in 1907 in his presidential address before the Modern Language Association of America; Scott believed that the first vocal utterances were caused by constrictions in breathing, and that these utterances eventually acquired meaning.

The famous Danish linguist, Otto Jespersen, believed that there might be partial truth in several of these theories, but that basically language developed from early chatter which he chooses to call "song." "These utterances were at first, like the singing of birds and the roaring of many animals and the crying and crooning of babies, exclamative, not communicative—that is, they came forth from an inner craving of the individual without any thought of any fellow-creatures. Our remote ancestors had not the slightest notion that such a thing as communicating ideas and feelings to someone else was possible. They little suspected that in singing as nature prompted them they were paving the way for a language capable of rendering minute shades of thought; just as they could not suspect that out of their coarse pictures of men and animals there should one day grow an art enabling men of distant countries to speak to one another."³ Concerning the way that meaning came to be attached to these sounds, Jespersen says, "Primitive man came to attach meaning to what were originally rambling sequences of syllables in pretty much the same way as the child comes to attach a meaning to many of the words he hears from

³ *Language* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), p. 436-37.

his elders, the whole situation in which they are heard giving a clue to their interpretation. . . . If one of our forebears on some occasion accidentally produced a sequence of sounds, and if the people around him were seen (or heard) to respond appreciatively, he would tend to settle on the same string of sounds and repeat it on similar occasions, and in this way it would gradually become 'conventionalized' as a symbol of what was then foremost in his and in their minds."⁴

As has been said, no one of the many guesses concerning the origin of language can be proved. However, a Frenchman, Joseph Vendryes, in the 1920's took from the early guesses the conclusions that seemed to him logically the most tenable, added to them his knowledge of psychology and history, and emerged with a theory that appears sane. Without the supporting evidence, Vendryes' theory is as follows:

In this distant ancestor of ours, whose brain was not yet developed for thought, language may have been purely emotive at first. It might have originated, for instance, as a single chant, keeping time with the steps or with hand-work, or as a cry like that of an animal expressing pain or joy, or showing fear or hunger. Subsequently the cry, taking on a symbolic value, would have been regarded as a signal capable of being repeated by others; and man, having this convenient procedure at his disposal, would have utilized it for communicating with his fellows, either to anticipate or to provoke some act on his part. Before becoming a rational instrument, language had to be an instrument of action, and one of the most efficacious at man's disposal. After the mind had once become alive to the meaning of the sign, it only remained to develop this wonderful invention for the perfection of the vocal apparatus to go hand in hand with that of the brain. . . . But we must start from consciousness of the sign. That fact once admitted, all language unfolds from it through a series of successive differentiations.⁵

To make Vendryes' theory concrete, but still remembering that it is no more than a theory, let us go back in imagination

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

⁵ *Language: A Linguistic Introduction to History*, tr. by Paul Rodin. (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), pp. 13-14.

more than a million years to the late Pliocene period, when man was an apelike animal—not an ape, but an apelike animal. As the apes did, he walked on his hind feet, used his hands for various types of manipulation, had stereoscopic vision, fell prey to various diseases, and employed both facial movements and characteristic sounds when affected by emotions. As the apes did, too, he chattered—chattered aimlessly, as birds sing, chattered because he enjoyed the sound of his voice. He shared with the apes the ability to produce a few sounds that his fellows could understand—perhaps sounds of warning, of anger, of fear, of joy. In so far as these sounds created reactions in others, they were language—a method of communicating. But something had to be added to the sounds before language rose above the animal level. That something was, as Vendryes calls it, the “consciousness of the sign.” Animal language is instinctive; human language is conscious, a conscious acceptance of a convention that a certain pattern of sounds will convey to a listener a signal that can be interpreted in approximately the same way the sender interprets it. “Psychologically the original linguistic act consists in giving to a sign a symbolic value. This psychological process distinguishes the language of man from that of animals.”⁶

Through earlier processes of evolution, apelike man had acquired certain potentialities denied the ape. His hands were more flexible, his thumb being especially useful for grasping. In the late Pliocene period, anthropologists say, man was making and using a few crude artifacts of grass, vines, and wood. He had a much greater advantage, however: the brain capacity of the largest ape cranium ever recorded is only 650 c.c. and that of most apes is and was much smaller, but some of the early near-humans had capacities of 700 c.c. or more. (Modern Europeans have an average brain capacity of about 1500 c.c.) Differences in the brain structure of man and apes appear to be

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

mainly quantitative. Man's advantage here may have been the decisive one in his later development.

In this late Pliocene period, anthropologists Jacobs and Stern assert,

The inventory of specific instinctive cries, shrieks, calls and other sound signals of the *Dryopithecus* ape was being supplemented and replaced by an ever-expanding inventory of noninstinctive learned call signals. The more apt, precise, and specific the sound signals became the more they contributed to the survival of their possessors. These primitive beginnings of true language constituted tools of a new kind for more successful survival, and they progressively replaced instinctive cries.⁷

How may these "learned call signals" have become tools of language? Probably very slowly, over a period of many thousands of years. The quotation from Jespersen on page 7 indicates the probable pattern of development. The "songs," grunts, growls, and other sounds, repeated in the same situations again and again, may have taken on meaning for speaker and listener alike. Psychologists might describe at least part of the process as the building of a conditioned response. A man, for instance, in a period of hunger, found some berries. He uttered an instinctive cry of pleasure as he began eating. His fellows heard him. The next day, and the next, the procedure was repeated. Gradually the particular sound made by the man came to be associated with berries. Eventually, hearing this sound, the man's hungry fellows might come running because it suggested that they too might find food. (Psychologists, as you know, can train even a rat to associate one sound with food, another with water, another with danger, and so on.) True language may have begun when the man voluntarily uttered the sound in order to inform his fellows of the presence of food and when they voluntarily came to him in response to his call. To repeat the words of Vendryes: "Psychologically the original linguistic act consists in giving to a sign a symbolic value."

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

Much still remained to be done. The theory explained here will be further expanded in later chapters dealing with the various "parts of speech." It is not necessary that you accept this theory in order to understand or accept the uncontroversial matter in this book. The theory has been presented only because it appears to be one possible or reasonable explanation of the origin of language.

The Families of Languages

Although we may never be able to say precisely how language began, we know that men speak diverse tongues, we know of some languages that have become extinct, and we may suppose that the number of extinct languages exceeds the number of modern languages in possibly as great a ratio as dead human beings exceed live ones. According to a study made in 1939 by Louis H. Gray, 2,796 languages, exclusive of dialects, are spoken in the twentieth century. There is reason to believe that tens of thousands of languages have become extinct, often leaving no visible trace.

Living languages fall into groups called families. The usual estimate is that approximately two hundred such families exist, although the number may be shown to be smaller if study of the so-called primitive languages reveals some now unknown relationships.

Only on a prolonged world tour would an American traveler be likely to encounter representatives of many of these families: one family, the Indo-European, he would find again and again. If he flew to the Far East he would encounter Indo-Chinese in China, Thailand, Burma, and Tibet (although the family relationship between Chinese-Siamese and Burmese-Tibetan is not definitely known); Indo-Chinese and Indo-European languages are spoken by more persons than are any others. Mongolian is not Chinese; it appears to be more closely related to Turkish and Finnish. Some of the languages of central Asia are hardly known to the outside world. In Japan

the traveler would find another language, very different from Chinese, and in Korea he would hear speech that may possibly be related to Japanese; in northern Japan he would find Ainu, apparently not related to Japanese. In India he would encounter Indo-European, although he most certainly would not recognize in Hindi, Bengali, Singhalese, and other languages anything related to his own; still different would be the Dravidian languages of southern India, which belong to another family. Oceania speaks primarily Malayo-Polynesian, but Dutch, French, English, and other Indo-European languages would be found side by side with the native tongues. Australia to the American would appear an English-speaking country, but in the hinterlands he would discover complex primitive languages.

If our traveler headed westward across the Indian Ocean to Africa, he would find representatives of more families of languages, including various Negro, Negrito, or Sudanic tongues, and in North Africa languages such as Berber, Hebrew, and Ethiopic. Crossing the Mediterranean, he would discover many varieties of Indo-European; except for the Basques, Finns, Hungarians, and Turks, nearly all Europeans speak an Indo-European language. Crossing the Atlantic to the Americas, the traveler would still find Indo-European in the ascendancy, but if he were curious about the native languages of North American and South American Indians, he would find them not only distinct from Indo-European but also from one another. Some linguists estimate that there are as many as 150 existing Indian languages in North America, in possibly as many as 50 families.

Attempts, not entirely satisfactory, have been made to point out the distinctive traits of the most important families of language. Indo-European, the only family with which most Americans are familiar, was originally highly inflected, although some modern Indo-European languages, notably English, have lost many inflections. The term "inflectional" implies