

PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH SYNTAX

A SURVEY OF
SENTENCE PATTERNS

BY

G. SCHEURWEGHS

PHIL. & LITT.DR.

*Professor of English in the University
of Louvain*



LONGMANS

PREFACE

This book is designed to provide students with linguistic evidence for analyses and discussions of English sentence structure. It is not a treatise on the nature and mechanism of the English language on the basis of linguistic science, but essentially a survey of the sentence patterns of present-day English: the constructions or collocations which may be freely imitated and serve as models for new formations, as distinct from idiom or idiomatic expressions or the stereotyped locutions that cannot be imitated and have to be learnt one by one as the vocabulary of the language has to be learnt.

Recent text-books on the study of English have given much importance to these patterns; but the valuable surveys of them that have so far been made are mostly restricted to the more usual constructions, especially to those of spoken English. It may therefore be useful to add a survey that is more detailed and more complete because it examines the patterns found in written English which students are unlikely to discover without intensive reading and observation. It will, it is hoped, enable them to write a language more sinewy and fluent than the one they have been taught in the first stage of their English studies.

The material is the result of a scrutiny of about fifteen publications which are listed in the first part of the Bibliography and referred to throughout by a single capital. They have all been published since 1945. Included in them is *The Times* from October 1954 to October 1957. When these basic works have not provided enough examples of a pattern under discussion they have been supplemented by readings from the other contemporary books listed in the second part of the Bibliography and referred to by the first three or four letters of the author's name. From these only a few quotations have been taken. And I have very occasion-

PREFACE

ally quoted, for the sake of illustration, from three modern dictionaries: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, *The Universal Dictionary of the English Language*, and *Harrap's Standard English-French Dictionary*.

The publications scrutinized cover a variety of subjects and are the work of authors of all ages. It may be thought that the survey would have given a more precise picture of current English if it had been confined to the writings of the younger generation who may be said to be shaping the language of tomorrow; but it seemed likely to be more useful, for the purpose in mind, to give these researches a broader basis so as to include as many aspects as possible of present-day English practice. The material has been taken from texts by more than a hundred writers, for many of the publications contain papers by several contributors. All the quotations are from the work of authors born in England. I have not drawn upon anything by Irish or Scottish writers, or from the overseas countries of the Commonwealth or the United States of America.

Since this is a survey of syntax, no notes are included on the various forms of nouns, adjectives and verbs. Appendix I is intended to be a section of reference for those who do not want to consult another grammar.

The traditional methods of dealing with English Grammar have been assumed to be inadequate, but thus far there is no consensus of opinion on what methods should replace the traditional ones. Since this work is a survey of sentence patterns, I have elected to classify them according to the old method, and the grammatical terminology I have used, which may be called conventional, is intended merely to provide easily recognizable labels for certain linguistic phenomena. I should like to make it clear that there is no question of defining the phenomena or of describing their nature and characteristics. My object is simply to identify the linguistic fact that is being referred to, and this is often done by pragmatic reference to form. The terminology is explained in Appendix II.

PREFACE

I should have liked to analyse the subtle nuances and the different shades of meaning of constructions that might seem to be interchangeable; such an analysis would have had to be based on the works of predecessors since I have not yet available the amount of material necessary to form a justified opinion based only on modern usage. I therefore refer to existing grammars and in the first place to R. W. Zandvoort's *A Handbook of English Grammar*.

It would have been profoundly interesting, and no doubt valuable, to undertake the counting of patterns in order to gain some reliable information about their frequency. It is not improbable that pattern counts will come to be regarded as of even more value than word counts. At present, any estimate of the frequency of a given collocation is based only on impressions. But I have hopes that this survey, as it stands, may offer some evidence as to the patterns that most need or deserve to be counted.

I am aware that many careful writers would prefer to avoid some of the constructions I have found in the texts I have read. It has not been my aim to give prescriptive rules; but I have thought it helpful to mark these constructions with the symbol Δ , as a warning to the reader that, although they are not infrequently found, they are not generally accepted.

I do not suppose for a moment that the book is free from minor blemishes, or even from major ones. But I am convinced that there would have been many more if I had not had the assistance of Mr. Ralph Cooke, who went through the manuscript and suggested important corrections and valuable improvements. I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude. I wish, also, to thank my publishers, Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., for their help in preparing the work for the press.

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CHAPTER I

SENTENCE PATTERNS WITH NOUNS PRONOUNS, ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

INTRODUCTION

- 1 A sentence is a series of words, or occasionally only one word, considered as a unit, formally distinguishable in writing from other units by an initial capital letter and a full stop, a question-mark or a note of exclamation at the end, making a statement, asking a question, expressing a wish or command, or being merely exclamatory.

Statements

He transferred the operational base of the Roman army to Chester. (Chu.18)

This dramatic scene on the frontiers of modern Wales was the prelude to a tragedy. (Chu.19)

Questions

What do you want the money for? (P.110)

Who demolished Jericho? (P.225)

Would you want the reports weekly? (G.22)

Do you believe in survival, Bendrix? (G.206)

Commands

Write down these sentences in pencil. (A.69)

Read the message aloud. (A.69)

For examples of exclamations see 532-3.

- 2 These statements, questions and commands may also be negative.

PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH SYNTAX

Statements

The conquest was not achieved without one frightful convulsion of revolt. (Chu.18)

This crowd does not cheer . . . I do not like crowds. (P.24)

Questions

Why didn't you get up earlier? (A.263)

Didn't you bring a coat with you? (A.273)

Commands

Don't keep any dinner for me. (Mac.122)

Don't put your elbow on the table. (A.253)

- 3 Apart from commands, the sentences illustrated thus far contain *two nuclei*, the subject and the predicate.

The subject, though its notion may be difficult to define in the abstract, is easily picked out; the predicate is what remains of the sentence when the subject has been set apart.

Examples

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Predicate</i>
The woman by the rail	rose in confusion at the sight of the strangers coming in. (G.194)
This result.	came as a big surprise to me. (Gor.213)
Inches as well as pounds	may upset calculations of transport. (L.48)
Medieval authorities	took a firm line about unsound food. (N.96)

Sentences not containing the two nuclei just mentioned may be as complete utterances of thought and emotion as any other, but their patterns are so varied that they cannot be surveyed in the present work, however much they deserve treatment.

- 4 A sentence of the type described in the preceding section contains a verb and other words; in the quotations already given these words are nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions.

Other sentences may contain participles or gerunds, infinitives or clauses.

SENTENCE PATTERNS

Participles

- There is at the same time a growing appreciation of that beauty. (I.27)
A familiar sight to travellers sailing across Conway Bay is the hump-backed outline of Puffin Island. (I.120)
Capable men, equipped with tools and timber, can produce a boat. (I.24)
No trace remains of the monastery founded by Aidan. (I.41)

Gerunds

- Who does not like exploring islands? (I.13)
The value of islands as observation-posts for studying the mystery of bird-migration has been recognized by ornithologists. (I.28)

Infinitives

- The Scottish magnates had been persuaded to recognize this princess of fourteen as his successor. (Chu.236)
Elfreda came to Coquet to plead with Cuthbert to accept the bishopric. (I.53)

Clauses

- Machiavelli has shrewdly observed that every fortress should be victualled for a year. (Chu.276)
Queen Philippa, who had followed him to the war, fell down before him in an edifying tableau of Mercy pleading with Justice. (Chu.277)

Sentences with participles, gerunds, infinitives and clauses will be discussed in subsequent chapters; so too will questions.

§ I. THE SUBJECT, INVERSION AND CONCORD

THE SUBJECT

- 5 The subject is a noun or a noun equivalent.

- The fairy flitted to the hidden gramophone. (P.42)
The committee resolved that Holland's should be offered a lease. (T.22-4-1955)
The mild, the flabby, and even the puny get a foothold in the contest. (T.29-9-1955)
He was not intended for a business career. (L.39)
This is an old fear. (L.59)
None of us wanted the children taken to the school. (T.10-6-1957)