A Communicative Grammar of English

Geoffrey Leech Jan Svartvik

A Communicative Grammar of English is a new kind of grammar. It is designed to give the maximum help to more advanced students of English, and for this reason employs a communicative rather than a structural approach. The main part of the grammar is consequently devoted to the *uses* of grammar and not to grammatical *structure*.

The first of the four parts describes the different variety labels used, for example, 'formal' and 'informal', 'written' and 'spoken' and 'British' and 'American' English. A special list of variety references enables the student to look up examples of each variety in other parts of the grammar. The second part introduces the main features of English intonation. The third, and most important part is devoted to the actual use of grammar in everyday speech and writing whilst the fourth part provides an alphabetically arranged guide to English grammar, with particular reference to the grammatical terms occurring in Part Three. A comprehensive index completes the book.

The authors were members of the team which produced the invaluable *Grammar of Contemporary English* and references to the most relevant sections of that grammar are included in Part Four so that the student can easily obtain more detailed information if required.

Longman

ISBN 0 582 55238 9

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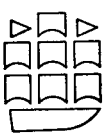
Geoffrey Leech
Jan Svartvik

Based on *A Grammar of Contemporary English*
by Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum,
Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartvik



Longman

LONGMAN GROUP LIMITED
London

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First published 1975
New impression 1978

ISBN 0 582 55238 9

Printed in Hong Kong by
Sheck Wah Tong Printing Press Ltd.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the help and advice of a number of friends and scholars in the preparation of this book. R A Close in particular deserves our thanks for giving us the benefit of his long and varied experience in English language teaching in cogent and detailed comments on the book in manuscript. A similar vote of thanks goes to Christopher Candlin, whose expertise in applied linguistics was of great value in the revision of Part Three. Two American readers, Faith Ann Johansson and William Pepicello, have earned our gratitude for hunting down 'unAmerican' influences in the draft, as well as for more general comments. We thank our co-authors of *A Grammar of Contemporary English* for their blessing on this enterprise, as well as for the more practical benefit of their advice and interest. We also thank Delia Greenall, Peter Clifford and Gordon Walsh of Longman for their care, expertise, and friendly guidance in bringing this book to press.

GL and JS

We also want to thank Bengt Altenberg, Olof Sager and R.W. Zandvoort, who have made valuable comments on the first impression of this book—some of which we have been able to make use of in this later impression.

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Preface

To the student

A Communicative Grammar of English is a new kind of grammar. In writing it, we have assumed that studying grammar, for the overseas student, makes most sense if one starts with the question 'How can I use grammar to communicate?'. Thus the main part of the book is devoted to the USES of grammar, rather than to grammatical STRUCTURE.

The book is intended primarily for the fairly advanced student, for example the first-year university student. If you are such a student you will have studied English grammar in one form or another already, but here we offer you a new perspective on the subject, which relates grammatical structure systematically to meanings, uses and situations. In this way we hope you will improve and extend the range of your communicative skill in the language. The book also supplies the essential information about grammatical forms and structures which you will need, and can therefore be used as a general reference book or sourcebook on English grammar.

The plan of the whole book is as follows:

Part One Varieties of English (pp. 19–32)
Here we explain briefly different kinds or varieties of English, such as ⟨informal English⟩, ⟨written English⟩ and ⟨American English⟩. We make extensive use of such labels in the other parts of the book, because it is important, for communication, to know in what contexts a particular form of language will be used. Part One ends with a list of references to variety labels, which enables you to follow up the range of grammatical constructions and uses associated with a given variety, such as ⟨informal English⟩.

Part Two Intonation (pp. 33–40)
Much of the book deals with spoken English, and effective communication in speech depends to a great extent on intonation. So in this part, we introduce the most important features of English intonation, together with the intonation symbols which are used in Part Three.

Part Three Grammar in use (pp. 41–185)
This is the central part of the book which you will want to use most. In it the different types of meaning and different ways of organising meaning are discussed in systematic order.

Part Four Grammatical compendium (pp. 187–308)
This part is a reference guide to English grammatical forms and structures, arranged in alphabetical order. It is a necessary complement to Part Three, in that it explains the grammatical terms used there.

There is a comprehensive index at the end of the book which will give you convenient access to the information contained in the various parts.

To the teacher

A Communicative Grammar of English is a fresh departure in grammar writing in that it employs a communicative rather than a structural approach. There are several reasons for emphasising the communication aspects of learning English grammar. Here, let us consider just two.

The type of student we have had in mind when writing this book is fairly advanced, for example a first-year student at a university or training college. Usually, he already has grounding in the grammar of the language after several years of school English. Yet his proficiency in actually using the language may be disappointing. This, we believe, may be partly attributed to 'grammar fatigue'. The student may therefore benefit from looking at grammar from another angle, where grammatical structures are systematically related to meanings, uses and situations.

The conventional method of presenting English grammar in terms of structure also has a certain drawback in itself. For example, in such a grammar notions of time may be dealt with in as many as four different places: under the tense of the verb, under time adverbs, under prepositional phrases denoting time and under temporal conjunctions and clauses. The student who is primarily interested in making use of the language rather than in learning about its structure (and this is true for the majority of foreign students) is not likely to find such an arrangement particularly helpful. The organisation of *A Communicative Grammar of English*, the central part of which deals with grammar in use, makes it possible to bring similar notions, such as those involving time, together in one place.

The book consists of four parts:

Part One Varieties of English
Where English gives us a choice of grammatical structures for a particular purpose, the different grammatical structures available are often not equivalent, since they belong to different 'styles' or 'varieties'. We believe that the appropriate choice is as important as it is difficult for the type of student we have in mind. Throughout the book, therefore, we make use of 'variety labels' such as ⟨formal⟩, ⟨informal⟩, ⟨written⟩, ⟨spoken⟩. Part One describes what these variety labels mean, and supplies in 22–30 a detailed list of their uses in the rest of the book.

Part Two Intonation
Intonation is clearly important in a communicative treatment stressing spoken English. In Part Two our object is to provide the student with the basic informa-

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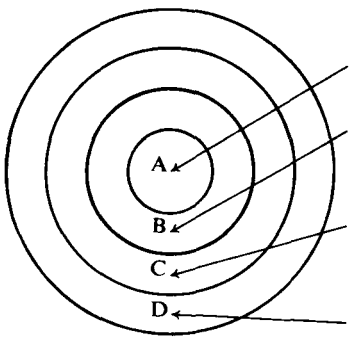
tion about English intonation that he needs in order to understand the intonation marking used in Part Three.

Part Three Grammar in use

Communication is not a simple process. It is helpful, for our purpose, to think of four circles, each including the other, representing the different types of meaning and different ways of organising meaning. The four circles in the figure correspond to Sections A–D in Part Three.



	Type of meaning or meaning organisation	Type of formal unit
A	Section A: 'Concepts'	Word, phrase, or clause (pp. 43–110)
B	Section B: 'Information, reality and belief'	Sentence (pp. 110–133)
C	Section C: 'Mood, emotion and attitude'	Utterance (pp. 134–155)
D	Section D: 'Meanings in connected discourse'	Discourse or text (pp. 156–185)

The right-hand column, stating the 'types of formal unit' associated with each section, should not be interpreted too strictly: it is useful to see the relation between the different layers of meaning and a hierarchy of grammatical units, but there is much overlap of categories, and other factors must be allowed for. For example, intonation has an important role in the expression of meaning in Sections B, C and D.

Section A: Concepts

The first circle is that of notional or conceptual meaning. Here we find the basic meaning categories of grammar: categories like 'number', 'definite meaning', 'amount', 'time', 'manner', 'degree'. Such categories identify aspects of our experience of the world. The structural units dealt with here are smaller than the sentence: *ie* words, phrases or clauses.

Section B: Information, reality and belief

The second circle represents logical communication. Here we make use of the categories of Section A to make judgements about truth and falsehood, and to give and elicit information about the world. Such categories as 'statements, questions and responses', 'affirmation and denial', 'possibility' and 'certainty' belong here. The formal unit we are chiefly concerned with is the sentence.

Section C: Mood, emotion and attitude

The third circle involves yet another dimension of communication: the attitudes and behaviour of speaker and hearer. At the speaker's end, language can express attitudes and emotions; at the receiving end, language can control or influence the actions and attitudes of the hearer. This 'controlling' aspect of communication

is performed through such speech acts as commanding, suggesting, advising, threatening, promising. Speech acts like these belong to what is often called the 'pragmatic' or 'interactional' aspect of communication. The logical meaning of sentences (Section B) is made use of, but is extended, or perhaps even 'distorted' to perform a different type of function. A question, for example, is logically designed to elicit information on a particular point; but it can be adapted 'pragmatically' for the purpose of making an offer:

Would you like some cake?

or making a suggestion:

Why don't you come with me?

or expressing a strong feeling:

Wasn't it a marvellous play?

The unit of language we are dealing with here is the UTTERANCE, which may or may not correspond to a sentence in length.

Section D: Meanings in connected discourse

The fourth circle comprises the organisational aspect of communication. The question here is 'How shall we arrange our thoughts', *ie* in what order shall we put them, and how shall we bind them together, in order to communicate them in the most appropriate way? Grammar is flexible enough to offer a considerable choice in such matters. This may be called the 'textual' or 'discourse' aspect of communication, because it concerns the composition of a whole text or discourse, not just the way we construct a single sentence.

The four circles of the diagram represent a rational progression from the most limited and detailed sphere of meaning to the most inclusive. This design underlies Part Three, but we have not stuck to it too rigidly. To have done so would often have meant inconvenient repetitions of material in different chapters. In dealing with emotive meaning (Section C), for example, we have moved directly from the EXPRESSION of emotion to the DESCRIPTION of emotion, since the two are often interrelated, even though it might be argued that the description of emotion belongs more properly to notional meaning (Section A). The overriding consideration, in arranging the material in sections, is that of dealing with related communicative choices together.

Part Four Grammatical compendium

Of the two main parts of the book, Part Three 'Grammar in use' is central and Part Four 'Grammatical compendium' is complementary to it: we need to know both the communicative choices offered by grammar (Part Three), and also the structural grammatical choices through which communication must be channelled (Part Four). The two sets of choices are, however, largely independent, and so are best dealt with separately. The entries in Part Four are arranged alphabetically.

Index

With a new arrangement, as in this grammar, it is essential to have numerous cross-references and a comprehensive index. We have aimed to provide both.

Relation to other work

This book is based on Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Longman, 1972). However, it cannot be regarded purely as a condensed version of that larger work since its arrangement is totally different, and it contains additional material (especially in Part Three). On the other hand, the structural or formal aspect of grammar is less comprehensively treated here than in *A Grammar of Contemporary English* and also in Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* (Longman, 1973). We have therefore added to each entry in Part Four a reference to the most relevant sections of *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, so that, if required, a more detailed treatment of the topic can be consulted in that book. We have attempted to simplify grammatical terminology and classifications as far as possible, so that the terms and categories treated in Part Four do not in every case correspond to the same terms in *A Grammar of Contemporary English*.

It would be tedious to attempt to acknowledge, except in the most general terms, the debts we owe to linguistic research. As influences on Part Three, mention must be made of recent developments in the study of semantics, pragmatics and discourse, and of the 'functional' approach to language as exemplified in M A K Halliday's *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (Arnold, 1973). A parallel development in language teaching method has been the orientation towards 'communicative' teaching in the work of D A Wilkins and others (see, for example, C N Candlin [ed.], *The Communicative Teaching of English* [Longman, 1975]).

Lancaster and Lund, May 1974
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Symbols

(Intonation symbols are discussed in 31–43.)

*	An asterisk signifies that what follows it is 'not good English', *ie* an unacceptable usage: *the car of John
( )	Optional items: but he didn't (do so)
/ or {}	Choice of items: Did anybody/somebody phone? the film {which we like best / that we like best / we like best} The two methods of representing alternatives can be combined: {all / both} {the/these books / books} This means that the following six combinations can occur: all the books all these books all books both the books both these books both books
[ ]	Bracketed numerals appear after examples when required for cross-reference: As in sentence [5], . . .
⟨ ⟩	Variety labels (*see* 1): ⟨formal⟩, ⟨AmE⟩, *etc.* [On ⟨GA⟩, ⟨RP⟩, *see* p. 17]
see	Cross-references: (*see* 408) means 'see Section 408 in this grammar'. (*GCE* 14.2) means 'see *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, Section 14.2'.
/ /	Slants enclose phonemic transcriptions: *see* p. 17.
‖	The double bar separates RP and GA pronunciations: *see* p. 17.

Key to phonetic symbols

Vowels and diphthongs

iː	as in b*ea*d	ɔː	as in c*augh*t ⟨RP⟩
ɪ	as in b*i*d	ʊ	as in p*u*ll
e	as in b*e*d	uː	as in p*oo*l
æ	as in b*a*d	ʌ	as in c*u*t
ɑː	as in c*a*lm	ɜː	as in b*ir*d ⟨RP⟩
ɒ	as in c*o*t ⟨RP⟩	ə	as in cupb*oa*rd ⟨RP⟩
eɪ	as in f*ai*l	ɪə	as in p*eer* ⟨RP⟩
oʊ	as in f*oa*l	eə	as in p*air* ⟨RP⟩
aɪ	as in f*i*le		
aʊ	as in f*ow*l		
ɔɪ	as in f*oi*l		

Consonants

p	as in *p*ig	h	as in *h*ot
b	as in *b*ig	m	as in su*m*
t	as in *t*wo	n	as in su*n*
d	as in *d*o	ŋ	as in su*ng*
k	as in come, *k*ing	l	as in *l*ot
g	as in *g*um	r	as in *r*ot
tʃ	as in *ch*eap	w	as in *w*et
dʒ	as in *j*eep, bri*dg*e	j	as in *y*et
f	as in *f*ew		
v	as in *v*iew		
θ	as in *th*ing		
ð	as in *th*en		
s	as in i*c*e, *s*ay		
z	as in ey*es*, *z*oo		
ʃ	as in pressure, *sh*ow		
ʒ	as in plea*s*ure		

Note on phonetic symbols

Phonetic symbols are used only occasionally in this text, mainly where they are needed to illustrate a grammatical distinction or rule. We have tried to use a system of transcription which is not biased towards a particular kind of speech, but this is not easy since British and American English (the two national varieties with which we are chiefly concerned) differ more obviously in pronunciation than in any other respect. To simplify matters, we consider only one accent from each national variety: *Received Pronunciation*, or RP, which is common among educated speakers in England (though not elsewhere in Britain); and *General American* pronunciation, or GA, which is used in the central and northern areas of the United States and in parts of Canada. The differences between these accents may be summarised under the following headings:

a *Different sounds are used for the same phoneme.* In other words, a phoneme (or 'distinctive sound', enclosed within slants / /) that is linguistically the same may be phonetically different in RP and GA. Very many differences fall into this category. For example:

/ɪ/, as in *bid*, is often more central in GA than in RP.
/e/, as in *bed*, is usually more open in GA than in RP.
/æ/, as in *bad*, is usually longer and more close in GA than in RP.
/ɔ:/, as in *cause*, is usually more open in GA than in RP.
/oʊ/, as in *go*, has a more central and unrounded first element in RP than in GA (which is why many British books show the vowel as /əʊ/; in GA the first element is closer to [o]).
/t/ and /d/ between vowels, as in *latter* and *ladder*, are often the same in GA (with the tongue flapped against the roof of the mouth).
/r/ is retroflex in GA but not in RP.

There are many other differences of this type, which for our present purposes we ignore.

b *RP and GA have a different number of phonemes.* Where RP has the four phonemes /æ/, /ɑ:/, /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/, GA has only three, /æ/, /ɑ/ and /ɔ:/. There is considerable variation in words with these vowels. For example:

RP has /æ/ in *hat*, *man*; /ɑ:/ in *path*, *laugh*, *calm*, *father*; /ɒ/ in *got*, *log*, *cross*, *long*; /ɔ:/ in *law*, *cause*.
GA has /æ/ in *hat*, *man*, *path*, *laugh*; /ɑ/ in *calm*, *father*, *got*, *log*; /ɔ:/ in *cross*, *long*, *law*, *cause*.

In this text, we use the double bar || to separate RP and GA pronunciations where necessary: the form before the double bar is RP, while that following is GA. For example:

got /gɒt||gɑt/, *long* /lɒŋ||lɔ:ŋ/

In other cases we represent RP and GA by a single transcription:

hat /hæt/, *law* /lɔ:/.

c *A sound used in one accent may be omitted in the other.* For example, RP does not pronounce a written *r* before a consonant:

farm /fɑ:m||fɑrm/, *cord* /kɔ:d||kɔrd/, *burn* /bɜ:n||bɜrn/

At the end of a word, /r/ is pronounced in RP if the next word begins with a vowel but not otherwise, whereas it is always pronounced in GA. To show this, a small raised /ʳ/ is used:

far /fɑ:ʳ/, *store* /stɔ:ʳ/, *sir* /sɜ:ʳ/

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