

A Course Book
in
English
Grammar

Dennis Freeborn

A Course Book in English Grammar

Dennis Freeborn

M
MACMILLAN
EDUCATION

© Dennis Freeborn 1987

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended), or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 33-4 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1987

Reprinted 1987

Published by

MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London

Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by Wessex Typesetters
(Division of The Eastern Press Ltd)
Frome, Somerset

Printed in Hong Kong

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Freeborn, Dennis

A course book in English grammar.—
(Studies in English language)

I. English language—Grammar—1950—

I. Title II. Series

428.2 PE1112

ISBN 0-333-40567-6

ISBN 0-333-40568-4 Pbk

Acknowledgements

The author and publishers wish to thank the following who have kindly given permission for the use of copyright material:

Express Newspapers plc for extracts from the *Daily Star*, 19.6.84 and 11.10.80; Guardian Newspapers Ltd for an extract from the *Guardian*, 23.2.84 and an extract based on a report in the *Guardian*, 19.6.84; Morning Star Co-operative Society Ltd for an extract from the *Morning Star*, 23.2.84; News International for an extract from the *Sun*, 23.2.84; Syndication International Ltd for an extract from the *Daily Mirror*, 10.10.80.

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright holders but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

Books are not made to be believed, but to be subjected to inquiry.

A book is made up of signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore it is dumb.

(From *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco,
translated by William Weaver, 1983)

A child speaks his mother tongue properly, though he could never write out its grammar. But the grammarian is not the only one who knows the rules of the language; they are well known, albeit unconsciously, also to the child. The grammarian is merely the one who knows how and why the child knows the language. (From *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco, 1985)

Preface

Reference grammars

A reference grammar was published in 1985 which is likely to be the authority on its subject for many years – *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, by Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. It has 1779 pages, and once you knew your way around it you would find that it contained all that you needed to know about the grammar of English.

But to use a reference grammar, you have to know what to look up; in other words, you have to know some grammar first. A determined student could sit down and read a reference grammar from beginning to end, but this would be unusual, and is not the best way to learn.

A Course Book in English Grammar is a different kind of book. It is planned as a textbook, to be read and studied chapter by chapter. Its aim is to describe the grammar of English in relation to its main functions in communication, and to provide enough detailed description to be of practical use in the study of texts in English.

Texts

The word *text* means any piece of writing, or transcription of speech, which is intended to communicate a message and a meaning. A scribbled note left on the table, 'Back at 2.20', is as much a text in this sense as a novel, a hire-purchase agreement or a sermon. It has a definite function, and its grammar is suited to that function.

An important part of the study of English is the reading, understanding and evaluation of texts, and a knowledge of the grammar of English is indispensable if this study is to be full and informed.

Knowing grammar

In one sense of *to know* ($know_1$), every speaker of English knows the grammar, because the grammar provides the rules for putting words into the right order so that our meaning is clear, and all speakers of English therefore must know the grammar in order to speak it. But in the sense of *to know about* ($know_2$), those who know the grammar are those who have studied it in the way provided in textbooks and reference grammar books, and can talk and write about grammatical structure.

The book has been written with native speakers of English in mind, not students learning English as a foreign language, and so it makes use of a native speaker's knowledge ($know_1$) of English, or that of an already fluent speaker of English. It does not therefore always provide comprehensive lists of features, and sometimes asks you to apply what you know already ($know_1$) in order to become aware ($know_2$) at a conscious level. In this sense, parts of it are a kind of do-it-yourself manual, although I assume that teachers and lecturers will at all stages be commenting on, developing and criticising what the book has to say.

Neither does the book pretend to 'make grammar easy'. Even the simplest texts (see, for example, the infant reading primer extracts in Chapter 1) contain features of grammar which might not appear in a short, over-simplified grammar book. On the other hand, no grammar book, even the 1779 pages of *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, is a complete description of English. So I have had to select, and leave out lots of interesting problems concerned with the best way of describing the language.

Models of language

You would find, if you explored the study of language (linguistics), several different 'models', or theories of language – ways of

understanding and describing it: traditional grammar, functional grammar, transformational-generative grammar, relational grammar, generalised phrase-structure grammar, and so on, all of which are meaningless terms to non-specialists in linguistics.

Nevertheless, you have to choose a model in order to talk about the grammar even at the simplest level. To use the words *sentence*, *noun*, or *word* is to begin to use a theory of language.

The model adopted in this course book is not new or original, but derives mostly from traditional and functional grammar, making choices between them when there is a difference. Functional grammar, as its name implies, is concerned to relate grammar to the major functions of language. The most recent presentation of this model (formerly called *systemic grammar*) is in Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

An example of the differences to be found between two descriptive models is in the meaning given to the term *complement*. The dictionary meaning of the word is 'that which *completes*'. In traditional grammar it means the element in a certain type of clause which refers back to the subject (*subject complement*) or the object (*object complement*). In the one-clause sentence,

Meanwhile life was hard.

life would be called the *subject* and *hard* is the *subject complement* in the terms of traditional grammar. In the one-clause sentence,

They found life hard.

life would be called the *object* and *hard* the *object complement*.

In this book, however, the meaning of *complement* in a clause is applied to any element which completes the grammar/meaning of the verb. There are therefore three kinds of clause complement, which are introduced in Chapter 1, and described in detail in Chapter 6.

Traditional and new terms

I have tried to explain clearly what each term means as and when the need for it occurs, and have chosen the more familiar (traditional)

terms wherever possible. But new and unfamiliar terms are necessary, for new and unfamiliar concepts, sometimes changing the scope of a familiar word (like *complement*), or introducing non-traditional terms (like *predicators in phase*). There has been a very positive development in our knowledge and understanding of the grammar of English in linguistic studies since the 1940s, which must be integrated with traditional descriptions.

As is said later in the book, no description of the grammar can be the only right one, and there are often alternative ways of describing the same feature. To keep the book to manageable proportions, such alternatives cannot always be described in detail, but they should be discussed rather than avoided wherever possible. In other words, students should be encouraged to think critically, and not to absorb passively.

Using the book

I assume that other descriptive and reference grammars will be used by teachers and lecturers with their students, to supplement and clarify what this course book can only sometimes mention briefly. The bibliography is intended to be a guide in providing a reference library, and is not comprehensive.

I have tried to avoid making up examples to illustrate features of the grammar (though this has not proved possible always), and have drawn upon a variety of texts, literary and non-literary, written and spoken. This is because it is only in the study of authentic English that a knowledge of the grammar can be put to use, and real texts are a challenge, sometimes producing good examples of what you are illustrating, but at the same time throwing up interesting problems.

Exercises are provided at every stage in each chapter. Teachers will make their own choice, and should modify and add to them according to the needs of their students. For instance, you should look in a variety of other texts for examples of features of the grammar which are being studied.

Fuzzy edges

One important idea to stress is what is called in linguistic study the

principle of **indeterminacy**, or **fuzziness**. This means that we cannot always assign a clear, unambiguous descriptive label to a word, phrase or clause. For example, is *swimming in I like swimming* a noun or a verb?

The edges of the boundaries between categories are not necessarily clear, and there are often borderline cases. When this happens, no student should feel a sense of failure or frustration at not knowing the right answer (there may not be one), but should try to see the alternatives, and why there are alternatives – again thinking linguistically and critically.

Concepts

There is, I believe, no short cut or easy way to understanding grammar which you can guarantee for every student. It demands the ability to conceptualise, and students have to make a breakthrough into conceptual thinking at some stage. For some this comes easily and early on; for others it remains a mystery and the penny never drops.

I have tried to anticipate some of the learning problems, drawing upon my own experience of teaching grammar, and to chart a way which provides continuity in teaching.

Where do you start? *Infants communicate whole meanings in their first 'words', and learn bit by bit to encode their meanings into clauses, which I take to be the basic grammatical unit which conveys whole meanings in the form of 'propositions'*. So the book begins with an outline of the function and form of the clause, and then looks in detail at words and phrases (constituents of clauses), before coming back to the clause and the combinations of clause patterns found in speech and writing.

Objectives

One practical objective of the book is to provide students with the 'tools of analysis' with which they can study any text in English, and see how far the grammatical structure contributes to its distinctive style and meaning. Chapter 9 is therefore concerned to demonstrate how grammar forms an essential ingredient of style, by using

extended extracts of literary and non-literary writing, and transcriptions of spoken English, just as Chapter 4 makes extensive use of real newspaper headlines.

The book attempts to show the relevance of a knowledge of grammar to understanding texts, which is an important part of the appreciation of literature – the poetic function of language. The fact that teachers of English have, for many years, managed without it, is no criterion of relevance. How much better they might have done with it!

York

January 1986

DENNIS FREEBORN

Symbols

Symbols and abbreviations are useful because they save time and space in describing grammatical features.

Word-classes (parts of speech)

n	noun
v	verb
adj	adjective
adv	adverb
pn	pronoun
p	preposition
cj	conjunction
scj	subordinating conjunction
ccj	coordinating conjunction

Classes of phrase

NP	noun phrase
VP	verb phrase
AdjP	adjective phrase
AdvP	adverb phrase
PrepP	prepositional phrase
PossP	possessive phrase

Classes of clause (form)

NCl	noun clause
PrepCl	prepositional clause
AdvCl	adverbial clause
NonfCl	non-finite clause

Classes of clause (function)

MCl	main clause
-----	-------------

SCI	subordinate clause
RelCl	relative clause

Elements of NP structure

Use lower-case letters:

d	determiner
d-Poss	PossP functioning as determiner
pre-d	pre-determiner
m	modifier (= pre-modifier)
h	head word
q	qualifier (= post-modifier)

Elements of VP structure

aux	auxiliary verb
op-v	operator-verb
m	modal auxiliary verb
h	<i>have</i> as auxiliary
be-prog	<i>be</i> used to form progressive aspect
be-pass	<i>be</i> used to form passive voice
s-aux	semi-auxiliary verb
v	main (lexical) verb

Elements of clause structure

Use upper-case letters (capitals):

S	subject
P	predicator
C	complement
A	adverbial

Kinds of complement:

O	object (or Co)
Od	direct object
Oi	indirect object
Ci	intensive
Ca	adverbial
pt	adverb particle

Bracketing

() to mark phrases [] to mark clauses
 < > to mark coordinated elements (words, phrases or clauses)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Symbols</i>	xvii
1 Encoding experience in language	1
1.1 Systems and abstractions	1
1.2 Words	3
1.3 Morphemes and syllables	6
1.4 Sentences and phrases	8
1.5 Meaning	9
1.6 Phrases as constituents of sentences	10
1.7 Processes and participants	11
1.8 Clauses	17
1.9 The rank scale	19
1.10 How clauses make sense	19
1.11 How meaning and grammar are related	20
1.12 Summary	23
2 Lexical words and meaning	25
2.1 Word-classes	25
2.2 Nouns	26
2.3 Verbs	30
2.4 Adjectives	37
2.5 Adverbs	45
2.6 Summary	48
3 Function words for referring and linking	49
3.1 Prepositions	49
3.2 Pronouns	52
3.3 Conjunctions	64

4	Mainly noun phrases and prepositional phrases	69
4.1	Phrases are constituents of clauses	69
4.2	Six kinds of phrase	69
4.3	More about NPs and PrepPs	71
4.4	More about pre-head modifiers in NPs	73
4.5	PrepPs as post-head modifiers, or qualifiers	76
4.6	NPs in PrepPs and PrepPs in NPs	78
4.7	PrepPs embedded in PrepPs	79
4.8	Clauses embedded in NPs	81
4.9	NPs and PrepPs as constituents of clauses	85
4.10	Summary	87
5	Verb phrases	92
5.1	Present and past tense	92
5.2	Aspect	113
5.3	Voice	117
5.4	Non-finite VPs	121
5.5	Catenatives in VP structure – predicators in phase	123
5.6	A note on symbols	124
6	Kernel clauses	125
6.1	Clauses – recapitulation	125
6.2	Subject and complements in kernel clauses	127
6.3	Kernel clauses in a simple text	131
6.4	Complements (3) – adverbial	133
6.5	Labelling constituent function	138
6.6	The original Hemingway text	142
6.7	More clause structure elements	142
6.8	Summary of kernel clause patterns	148
6.9	Analysis of a text	149
7	Complex phrases within clauses	156
7.1	Complex and derived clauses	156
7.2	Complexity within phrases	156
8	Complex and derived clauses	178
8.1	Subordinate non-finite clauses	178
8.2	Subordinate finite clauses	188
8.3	Derived clauses	200
8.4	Complex and derived clauses in a text	210

CONTENTS

vii

8.5	Making information prominent	214
8.6	Summary	217
8.7	Postscript – ways of diagramming a structural analysis	217
	Written sentences and spoken clause-complexes	228
9.1	A note on concepts and terminology	228
9.2	Sentence or complex clause?	229
9.3	The sentence in written English	232
9.4	The clause-complex in spoken English	239
9.5	Text analysis 1	245
9.6	Text analysis 2	250
9.7	Text analysis 3	255
9.8	Text analysis 4	258
9.9	Text analysis 5	262
9.10	Text analysis 6 – a complex sentence	263
9.11	Diagramming sentence structure	265
	<i>Bibliography</i>	271
	<i>Index</i>	273

1

Encoding experience in language

1.1 Systems and abstractions

1.1.1 Language, speech and writing

Speech consists of sounds, and writing of visible marks on a surface, and so both are **concrete** and exist in the material world. But the sounds of speech and the marks of writing are not language itself. Language is **abstract** or immaterial, something we learned as small children by listening to other people *using* it, not by being taught. All children, at some stage, say things like,

I've drunked my milk all up;
He had his foot bended like this;
He's drawed on the window ledge;
I put a pillow that way and then slepted on it;

all authentic recordings of a five-year-old girl. She did not learn *drunked*, *bended*, *drawed* and *slepted* from her parents. She has learned for herself the grammatical rule that says 'to form a past tense, add *-ed* to the verb', by hearing words like *rubbed*, *walked*, and *cooked* many times, and then applying the rule without consciously knowing what she is doing. She obviously knows what a verb is too, and you can be sure her parents have never mentioned the words *verb* or *past tense* to her. What she has yet to learn is that a large number of verbs in English are irregular, and don't form a past tense by adding *-ed*, though she will have heard lots of them, including *drank*, *bent*, *drew*, *slept* and so on. There are exceptions to the rules of the language, which we describe in **abstract terms** as *verb* and *past tense*. The **concrete realisations** of these abstract