A Modern English Grammar

with an Appendix on Semantically Related Prepositions

Knud Schibsbye

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PREFACE

The aim of this book is to provide the student of English with a manual of English grammar which emphasizes those points where different shades of meaning are attached to phrases and constructions that seem interchangeable, and where stylistic distinctions may be made by choosing one linguistic form rather than another to express the same reality. The grammatical terms used are such as are commonly met with in grammars; if a term should be unfamiliar to a reader, its meaning should be easily inferred from the illustrative examples immediately following. Historical considerations are normally left out of account except in a few cases where they throw valuable light on present-day usage.

The bulk of the examples are taken from books, periodicals, etc. that have appeared since the Second World War. Most examples are anonymous; only occasionally has the source been given when it seemed of importance for the evaluation of the example. The reader may however rest assured that the examples quoted are genuine. Only so much of the context is given as is necessary in the case in question, but otherwise the quotations are left unaltered; hence the seeming inconsistency in the use of capitals in the opening word of abbreviated sentences quoted. The examples are separated by means of a diagonal; however, sometimes two diagonals are used to call attention to a slight difference between the preceding examples and the following in order to avoid stating an obvious difference in so many words (e.g. 13.4.1 second paragraph). To facilitate the reading of the examples the relevant part is printed in spaced bold type. In cases where the lack of a word is the point to be noted, double spacing between two words in the sentence is resorted to in order to catch the reader's eye; thus in the case of relative contact clauses (10.6.1).

The decimal system used for numbering the paragraphs has been adopted with the aim of achieving clarity as to the structure of the book as well as for ease of reference.

I am, of course, indebted to other writers on English grammar; in particular to Otto Jespersen and R. W. Zandvoort. Finally I wish to express my gratitude to Ingeborg Nixon, Ph.D., for her invaluable help in preparing the manuscript.

K. S.

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VERBS

1.1.1 In practice it is not difficult to distinguish this part of speech; it is generally agreed that it comprises such words as *be, have, must, take, live, teach, spend.*

But it is difficult to define the class. If we take the form as our basis we might, for instance, fix on the suffix *-s* in the 3rd pers. sing. present, but this would exclude *can, may,* etc.

Another form criterion that seems applicable is the difference in the expression of present and past: *live/lived, fight/fought.* But this definition would not cover *put, set,* etc.

If we distinguish according to function, verbs could be defined as the sentence-forming element of a word-group. *God in his heaven* is not a sentence; *God is in his heaven* is. But this definition would not include infinitives, gerunds, and participles: ***To be** or not **to be**, that is the question / **Erring** is human / A **sinking** ship / **Lost** horizon.*

A wider definition on this basis could be obtained by regarding the nexus-forming*) element of a group as a verb. This formulation would cover some more of the verbal forms mentioned above: *I found him **missing** / I expected him **to be** dead.* But this definition is likewise unsatisfactory, since in a sentence such as *don't speak with your mouth full* the term nexus is applied to *your mouth full.*

A definition by content is the most comprehensive, but also the vaguest. One might say that verbs express 'behaving'—partly in the sense of the subject manifesting itself (in the case of verbs used intransitively): *he works / lived*; partly of the way the subject behaves towards somebody or something else: *he loves / loved her* (in the case of verbs used transitively).—In the first case the dividing line between verbs and adverbs will become blurred, as can be seen in *he up and struck me*†); in the second case the dividing line between verbs and

*) Nexus is one of the three main types of grammatical combinations: co-ordination exists between two or more elements of a phrase, each of which has the same function in the sentence as the whole phrase: *he has **a dog and a cat** / she **caught and killed** the mouse*; in subordination one of the elements of a phrase has the same function in the sentence as the whole phrase: *we saw **a very old castle*** (where *castle* fulfils the same function as *very old castle*); in a nexus none of the elements of the phrase has the same function in the sentence as the whole phrase: *I think **he'll come** / I found **myself mistaken*** (where *myself* is not the object of *found*; the object is *myself mistaken*).

†) Here *up* is still an adverb, but in the vulgar *he ups and says* . . . the word must be said to have changed into a verb.

prepositions; compare *A. versus B.* and *A. playing B.*, where *versus* and *playing* may be said to express the same relationship.

1.1.2 Verbs can be classified under different heads.

If we classify them according to content we may distinguish between

(1) verbs expressing activity: *walk, fight, eat, speak,* whose common denominator is the verb *do*;

(2) verbs signifying condition: *sleep, wait, live,* whose common denominator is *be*; (1) and (2) may be comprised in the designation 'durative verbs', as opposed to:

(3) verbs signifying change ('perfective verbs'): *die, turn, rise,* whose common denominator is *get.*

There are however no clear-cut distinctions. A verb can quite well belong to more than one of the above groups: *I don't want to spend all my days in a small village; I want to live.* Here *live* expresses activity, not, as in general, condition: *they live in Yorkshire.* Or compare: *she covered her face* and *snow covered the ground,* where *cover* expresses activity (+ change) and condition respectively.

Verbs signifying change often show in their past participle a transition to designating the resulting condition. In a number of cases this difference is expressed by linking the past participle with *have* or *be*: *he* ***has gone*** *to China / as he stood in the dock,* ***gone was*** *the look of confidence which had paved the way for many big swindles // ***have*** they* ***agreed*** *to the conditions? / they* ***were*** *all* ***agreed*** *on the verdict // he* ***has packed***: *I saw him throw a heap of clothes into a portmanteau / '****Are*** *you* ***packed?'***—*They* ***were***; *and presently he telephoned for a cab // the war* ***has not finished*** *yet / when I have said it is wonderful weather for the time of year, I* ***am finished.***—In many cases the two values are more or less equally probable: *the villagers* ***are gone*** *to rest / when she returned to the flat she found that the key and the pound notes* ***had gone*** */ he turned his head and his heart almost stood still with horror: his trousers* ***had gone!*** */ even when she* ***is recovered,*** *post-influenza will keep her weak till the summer / when she* ***was dressed,*** *she wanted to write some letters.*—In cases of this kind expressions with *be* occur more frequently in literary English than in ordinary speech: *the tunes of the world's purposes* ***are gone*** *mad and bad / the day* ***was fallen*** *into a wonderful still evening / even if nothing were left of the Gothic but a few grey ruins . . . , even if all the spires* ***were fallen*** *. . . , the study of them would still be an exciting study / his foes had pressed upon him; and eventually it had seemed that his hour* ***was come*** */ he*

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banked his treasure in the hearts of his friends, and they will cherish his memory till their hour ***is come*** */ as soon as we* ***were started***, *the tempest dropped.* (See also **1.5.7**.)

A similar doubleness of content in the past participle is to be seen after *have* + object: *I had him beaten* = 'I caused him to be beaten' as against *he was impressed by the Paris Exposition. He realized that in many departments of manufacture the Frenchmen* ***had us beaten***.

1.1.3 If the verbs are classified according to function we may distinguish between:

1. verbs used transitively: *the boy struck the dog*;
2. verbs used intransitively: *I dream every night*;
3. verbs used as copulas: *he is dead / my sister became a nurse*;
4. verbs used as auxiliary verbs: *I will help you / I have seen him.*

But no clear distinction can be drawn; very few verbs belong to only one of these groups. Such verbs as *hazard, rise, become, shall*, are of course easily classified; but many so often have several usages that it is difficult to decide which group they most often belong to: *I* ***smoke*** *cigars / I like to* ***smoke*** *// You'll* ***get*** *no reward / You'll* ***get*** *cold / you'll* ***get*** *caught*. But commonly a verb occurs most frequently in one of these usages, which one's linguistic feeling therefore tends to regard as the 'true' function of the verb in question: words such as *smile, walk, live* are generally used intransitively, *excite, kill, teach* transitively; but it must not be forgotten that the opposite usage is by no means rare: *she* ***smiled*** *her approval / he* ***walked*** *the horse up the hill / he* ***lived*** *a life of ease // the modern suburb seems designed to insulate the child from any vivid sensation which might* ***excite*** *or disturb / it is easy to* ***kill***, *but impossible to restore life / I believe she* ***teaches***.‡)

The formal distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs, formerly a prominent feature of English, producing many pairs of words: *set—sit, lay—lie*, etc. has now vanished, and most verbs can have both functions.

1.1.4 A verb used transitively expresses a two-sided action as seen in *the girl loves her doll / I hear a groan*. Here the content of the

‡) It is better to describe a case of this kind as '*teach* used intransitively' than as '*teach* with implied object'.—This may be illustrated by an example (Somerset Maugham: Of Human Bondage, Ch. X): *'Did your mother wash?'—'Yes.'—'She was a washerwoman then?'—'No, she wasn't.'—'Then she didn't wash.'*—Here it may be said either that *wash* is used with implied objects, and that there is a play on the two objects, *linen* and *parts of the body*, or, which is better, that *wash* is used intransitively, and that the pun is based upon the two values of the intransitive usage: 1) 'to be a washer-woman', 'to do the washing', and 2) 'to keep oneself clean'.

sentence could be symbolized by: subj. → vb. → obj.; that is to say, each sentence may be said to contain two more or less equally important elements: the activity of the subject: *the girl loves . . . / I hear . . .*, and the fact that the activity is directed towards the object: *. . . loves her doll / . . . hear a groan.* Sentences of this type, the most common transitive usage, can easily be converted into the passive.

In the case of transitive verbs which also have perfective associations (i.e. signifying change) the following point should be noted: the passive form may signify either condition or change: *the shop will be closed on Sunday* ('will be closed' = 'will not be open' as well as 'the closing will take place') / *he was buried here* ('was buried' = 'lay buried' as well as 'the burial took place').

1.1.5 Among special transitive usages to which the above-mentioned symbol (subj. → vb. → obj.) does not quite apply the following may be mentioned:

Verbs with an object of result: *he struck a light* (cp. *he struck the dog*) / *he dug a grave* (cp. *he dug the ground*) / *he painted the window* (*painted = made a picture of*; compare the same sentence with *painted = put paint on*). The passive form of these verbal combinations signifies change only, not condition, and thus does not possess the above-mentioned ambiguity.

A special type of object of result is the object related in content to the verb: *she smiled a curious smile / she laughed a sad laugh / she sighed a little sigh / Jeeves coughed that soft cough of his / die a glorious death / sleep the sleep of the just.* The object in these cases cannot be the substantive in question without the addition of a qualification, and the expressions cannot be put into the passive form. These 'cognate object' expressions are of stylistic importance in that they can replace the corresponding adverbial expressions (in the examples quoted: *curiously, sadly*, etc.).

Verbs with a reflexive pronoun as object: *she is dressing herself / he hurt himself / I usually shave myself.*—These combinations cannot be expressed in the passive.

1.1.6 As regards verbs in the intransitive usage it may be noted that they often have the same associations as the same verbs + object, and the 'implied object' (cf. note to **1.1.3**) varies according to context and situation: *we wash every Monday* usually means '*wash the linen*'.—*How dirty you are, don't you ever wash?* implies the re-

flexive object.—Special interest is attached to those verbs which in addition to being used intransitively often occur with a reflexive pronoun as object. The difference between the two forms of expression may be great or small; compare *he recovered* and *he recovered himself* with *he dressed (himself)*; in the last example the intransitive and the reflexive construction both mean 'put on clothes', each however having different connotations. (See further under reflexive verbs **6.7.1** ff.). *They married* will have a reciprocal association if *they* represents 'a couple', but not if *they* represents, for instance, 'the brothers'. Many verbs used intransitively may have a reciprocal implication, e.g. *they* ***parted*** *in anger / they* ***kiss*** *or* ***quarrel*** *or* ***fight*** *whenever they* ***meet***.

1.1.7 Verbs used as copulas form a fairly large group, of more than fifty: *It* ***seems*** *a pity / he* ***became*** *rich*. Most of them also have other usages: *get, grow, turn*, etc.; in the case of many of them the copula function is not the most important usage: *the well* ***ran*** *dry / his prediction* ***came*** *true / his words* ***rang*** *true / it* ***sounds*** *nice // he* ***made*** *a fine soldier / that* ***proved*** *the case*. In cases such as the last two examples, where the verb may have a substantive attached both as object and as predicative complement (and is therefore ambiguous without its context) the difference between the two usages is shown by the possibility of putting it in the passive; verbs used as copulas do not allow this.

1.1.8 Auxiliary verbs (*have, do, be, will*, etc.) in combination with the infinitive and the participles form compound verbal phrases: *you must go now / he has been killed*.—They may represent large or small parts of the predicate of a preceding sentence: *no man ever hated a woman as he did / no man ever hated a woman as he did his wife / They looked upon him, as painters often do writers, with contempt because he was a layman, with tolerance because he practised an art, and with awe because he used a medium in which they themselves felt ill at ease* (Somerset Maugham) / *she has deceived you as she has me / If a man's house ever fell in ruins about him, mine has about me / treat him as you would a friend*.

The Forms of the Verb

1.2.1 The English verb normally has four forms:

I. The basic form: *like, love, judge, add.*

Function: (a) infinitive, (b) present indicative with the exception of the 3rd pers. sing., (c) imperative, (d) subjunctive.

(1) *Can, may, must, ought, shall, will* have only one of these functions: the present. For semantically corresponding infinitives various expressions are resorted to such as: *I shan't* ***be able to*** *leave / I hate* ***to have to*** *wait / he was sorry* ***to be obliged to*** *leave his home / he seemed to me* ***to want to*** *say something / I don't like* ***to be under an obligation to*** *help people I don't know / it is important for the patient* ***to have the will to*** *live.*

(2) *Be* has three of the functions mentioned, but not the present indicative. The forms of the latter are: 1st pers. sing. *am*, 2nd pers. sing. *are*, 3rd pers. sing. *is*, pl. *are.*

1.2.2 **II.** The basic form + *-s*: *likes* /laiks/, *loves* /lʌvz/, *judges* /dʒʌdʒiz/, *adds* /ædz/.

The suffix is pronounced /s/ after unvoiced sounds, /z/ after voiced sounds, except after the sibilants /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, where it is pronounced /iz/: *kisses* /kisiz/, *uses* /ju:ziz/, *wishes* /wiʃiz/, *rages* /reidʒiz/.

Function: 3rd pers. sing. pres. ind.

(1) The addition of *-s* is combined with a sound change in the verbs *have, do, say*, the 3rd pers. pres. being *has* /hæz/, *does* /dʌz/, *says* /sez/.—N.B. *gainsays* is regular /gein'seiz/.

(2) Orthography: *-es* is added after sibilants if the basic form does not end with *e*: *wishes, kisses*: also after single *o*: *goes, does.* After *oo*, on the other hand, the orthography varies: common forms are for instance *woos*, but *cooes.*

Final *-y* after a consonant is changed to *-ie*: *marries*, while *-y* after a vowel is preserved: *buys.*

Gemination is found only in a few cases, namely after a stressed single vowel + final *-s* or *-z*: *gasses/quizzes. Bias(s)es* and *focus(s)es* are uncertain.

(3) The verbs mentioned in **1.2.1**(1), *can, may*, etc., do not add a suffix in the 3rd pers. sing.; the same applies to *dare* and *need* when these verbs are followed by an infinitive without *to*: *he dare not go / need anybody know?—Don't* for *doesn't* is met with in uneducated speech.—For the irregular present forms of *be* see **1.2.1**(2).

1.2.3 III. The basic form + *-(e)d*: *liked* /laikt/, *loved* /lʌvd/, *judged* /dʒʌdʒd/, *added* /ædid/.

The suffix is pronounced /t/ after unvoiced sounds, /d/ after voiced sounds, except after /t/ and /d/, where the pronunciation is /id/: *started* /sta:tid/, *handed* /hændid/.

Function: preterite and past participle.

(1) The addition of /d/ is combined with a sound change in: *had* /hæd/, *said* /sed/.—N.B. *gainsaid* is pronounced both /gein'seid/ and /gein'sed/. Note also *used* followed by *to* in the preterite to indicate the iterative, etc. in the past, and in the past part. with a corresponding concept: *I used to sing this song / I used to know him / I am used to doing it*. In this usage the pronunciation is /ju:st/ as against inf. *use* /ju:z/, whose /z/ is unchanged in the preterite and past part. in the other usages of the verb.*)

(2) Orthography: *-d* is added after a stem ending in *-e*: *agreed, hated, pleased*; otherwise *-ed*. If the uninflected form ends in *-y*, the rule mentioned above (**1.2.2**(2)) applies: *dried, married / played, stayed*. Exceptions are *laid, paid, said* (N.B. *pay* as a nautical term = 'let out' is regular as to spelling: *a cable is **payed** out*).

A single final consonant is never doubled after two vowels: *sweated, detailed* (N.B. *equalled, qu* counting as a consonant combination); but after a single vowel carrying the main stress of the stem: *regretted, inferred*.—If the last syllable does not carry the main stress of the stem there is normally no gemination: *visited, galloped*. However, *-c* in the ending *-ic* is doubled to *-ck*, although there is no stress on the syllable: *picnicked, frolicked, trafficked*; likewise *-l*: *travelled, labelled, libelled*. There is also gemination of the final consonant in an unstressed syllable in a few other words (note in these the unweakened quality of the unstressed vowel): *humbugged, worshipped,*

*) *used to* used iteratively in the past tense is a special case in the syntactical respect also: like the auxiliary verbs it can be found without the *do* paraphrase in negative and interrogative sentences: *he used not to smoke / used you to do such things?* in addition to expressions with *do*: *I didn't use to be*.—See also **1.8.10**.

kidnapped, handicapped, nonplussed.—Uncertainty as to gemination is found in a few words: *bias(s)ed, focus(s)ed.*

(3) A considerable number of verbs have an irregular preterite and/or past participle; see the list in **1.2.6.**

Special cases are: *be*, which has two preterite forms: 1st and 3rd pers. sing. indicative *was*, 2nd pers. sing. and the whole of the plural indicative, together with all persons sing. and pl. in the subjunctive, *were*;—and the verbs *can, may*, etc., mentioned in **1.2.1**(1) which have no past participle; for semantically corresponding past participles various expressions are resorted to, such as: *he has never* ***been able to*** *walk / she has always* ***been allowed to*** *do what she likes / I have* ***had to*** *sell my books / he has, no doubt,* ***wanted to*** *help you*, and the like.

1.2.4 **IV.** The basic form + *ing*: *liking, loving, judging, adding.*

Function: present participle and gerund.

Orthography: mute *-e* is dropped: *loving, coming*; but not in *dyeing* (compare *dying*); uncertainty in *ey(e)ing*. *-e* is furthermore preserved in *singeing, swingeing, tingeing* in distinction to *singing*, etc.; but not in *cringing*. Verbs ending in *-oe* keep *-e*: *canoeing, hoeing, shoeing*. Verbs in *-ie* change to *-y*: *tying, lying, dying.*

Gemination to the same extent as in the addition of *-ed* (see above **1.2.3**(2)): *sweating, sailing / equalling / regretting, inferring / galloping, visiting / trafficking, travelling, worshipping, focus(s)ing.*

1.2.5 In addition to these four normal forms there are certain archaic forms:

3rd pers. sing present indicative: *-(e)th* /(i)θ/: *loveth, runneth.*

There is a sound change of the stem in *hath* /hæθ/, *saith* /seθ/, *doth* /dʌθ/. (N.B. besides *doth* also *doeth* /du:iθ/: *doth* as an auxiliary verb: *the lake* ***doth*** *glitter*; *doeth* as a full verb (non-auxiliary): *he* ***doeth*** *wrong.*)

-(e)st /(i)st/ in the 2nd pers. sing. indicative present and past: *helpest, runnest, couldst, brought(e)st.*

N.B. *hast, dost* with sound change of the stem: /hæst/, /dʌst/; what has been said above of *doth* and *doeth* applies also to *dost* and *doest.*

Some of the verbs mentioned in **1.2.1**(1) may take this archaic suffix, e.g. *canst, mayst.*

The forms in *-(e)st* are used only with the pronoun *thou.*

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