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Oxford

DICTIONARY OF

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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modal verb

do-support

God's truth phoneme

embedding

a-word

sentence

International Phonetic Alphabet

green grocer's apostrophe

glottal stop

sentence

periphrasis

back formation

green grocer's apostrophe

ion

semantic shift

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English Grammar

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Sylvia Chalker

Edmund Weiner



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本社编辑部

Introduction

Grammar, etymologically speaking, is related to *glamour*. Though few people might claim that grammar is glamorous in the modern sense, there is considerable interest in English grammar today and no shortage of grammar books, ranging from small basic books aimed at children or elementary-level foreign learners, through more advanced manuals to large scholarly works. The trouble is – they may be about the same language, but they do not always speak the same language. The very range of the grammar books on offer presents problems.

There are many ways of describing grammar, and a wealth of terminology. Some of it strikes the layman as jargon (*disjunct*, *matrix*, *pro-form*, *stative*); other words appear ordinary enough but conceal specialized meanings (*assimilation*, *comment*, *focus*, *specific*). Worse, the same terms, old or new – *comparison*, *formal*, *pronoun*, *reported speech*, *root*, *stress* – are used by different grammarians with different meanings.

Such difficulties are not entirely avoidable. Any subject of study needs specialist words. Different grammarians are entitled to analyse language in different ways, and fresh viewpoints may call for new terms. But while grammarians sometimes explain what they mean by a new or unusual term, it is rarer for them to point out that they are using an existing term in a different way. This is a cause of real confusion. Another problem is that new terms may in the end turn out simply to be alternatives for an old concept – a synonym in fact (e.g. *progressive*, *continuous*).

We have tried in this dictionary to indicate the range and variety of meanings that may lie behind a single term. The main emphasis is on the terminology of current mainstream grammar, but we have also included a considerable number of entries on the related areas of speech and meaning – more grandly known as phonetics and semantics. Users will also find some terms from generative grammar, which has greatly influenced mainstream grammar in recent years – but some of the more theoretical terminology of linguistics and semantics is excluded. We have also on the whole excluded outdated grammatical terminology, apart from a few traditional terms which may be familiar to the general reader.

The authors would like to thank Professor Flor Aarts, of the Katholieke Universiteit, Nijmegen, who read an early draft of the book: his comments, we believe, have led to many improvements, but the authors are alone responsible for any blemishes that remain. We

Introduction

would also like to thank our families for their support, encouragement, and, at times, forbearance.

SC
ESCW

London, Oxford 1993

Organization

- 1 *Entries* are strictly alphabetical. Thus:

agent
agentive
agentless passive
agent noun

- 2 Where two or more terms are *synonyms*, the definition appears under the preferred term, usually with a reference to the alternative term, e.g.

folk etymology
... Also called *popular etymology*.

and the other term is cross-referenced, e.g.

popular etymology
The same as FOLK ETYMOLOGY.

- 3 Where a word is not a grammatical term in itself but forms part of a *phrase* which is dealt with elsewhere, this is indicated, e.g.

act See SPEECH ACT.

- 4 Where a term is dealt with at the entry for some larger term, this is indicated, e.g.

formulaic subjunctive See SUBJUNCTIVE.

- 5 Where two or more terms are in a *contrastive* relationship, this is stated at the beginning of both entries, e.g.

abstract ...
... Contrasted with CONCRETE.

concrete ...
... Contrasted with ABSTRACT.

- 6 *See* at the end of (part of) an entry indicates that further information will be found at the entry indicated. Sometimes the user is referred to a closely related word, e.g.

coordinate ...
... See COORDINATION.

At other times the reference is to a 'background' concept, e.g.

fall-rise ...
... See INTONATION.

- 7 *Compare* at the end of (part of) an entry indicates that although the entry is complete, it may be useful to read entries for related or

Organization

overlapping terms, or terms with which this term could be confused, e.g.

abbreviated . . .

. . . Compare BLOCK LANGUAGE, REDUCED clause.

These particular entries show that certain types of language that might reasonably be described as *abbreviated* are in fact given special labels.

8 *Cross-references* to other entries are given in small capitals. A cross-reference to a phrase listed within an entry is given in a mixture of small capitals (for the entry headword) and italics (for the remainder of the phrase), e.g. DUMMY element.

9 Words are marked with *part-of-speech labels* (*n.* = noun, *adj.* = adjective, *v.* = verb) only when they are used as more than one part of speech.

10 Where part-of-speech labels are conjoined (e.g. (*n. & adj.*)), the definition is framed so as to cover both uses, with parentheses surrounding the part of the definition that applies to only one of the two uses, e.g.

ditransitive

(*n. & adj.*) (A verb) having two objects.

which is equivalent to:

(*n.*) A verb having two objects. (*adj.*) Having two objects.

countable

(*n. & adj.*) (Designating) a noun with singular and plural forms.

which is equivalent to:

(*n.*) A noun with singular and plural forms.

(*adj.*) Designating a noun with singular and plural forms.

11 In certain entries for morphological terms, words and phrases quoted as examples are given *abbreviated dates* indicating their earliest known recorded appearance in English. In these, the number is that of the century and the preceding E, M, L mean 'early', 'mid', and 'late': 'E19' means '1800-1829', 'M19' means '1830-1869', and 'L19' means '1870-1899'. OE means 'Old English' (before 1150), ME 'Middle English' (1150-1349), and LME 'late Middle English' (1350-1469).

12 In many entries, *quotations* from works on language are given in order to illustrate the use of the word being defined. Only the author's name and the date of the work are cited: fuller details are given in the List of Works Cited.

13 *Derivatives* of a headword are listed undefined at the end of the entry if their meaning is plain once that of the parent word is known and if they are not found in special phrasal combinations.

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A

A

ADVERBIAL as an ELEMENT of clause structure.

The symbol is used in some modern analyses of clause structure. See ADVERBIAL (1).

abbreviated

Shortened or contracted so that a part stands for the whole.

1 Designating language, or a clause or sentence, in which words inessential to the message are omitted and the grammar sometimes deviates from standard rules.

This is a very general term, since individuals will vary in how severely they abridge and exactly how they do it, when, for example, writing diaries or making lecture notes for private use.

Abbreviated sentences of a more predictable kind are a frequent feature of informal writing and conversation. Here the subject and part of the verb are often omitted.

Having a wonderful time here

See you soon

All news then

More tea? (= Would you like . . . ?, Do you want . . . ?)

Abbreviated language overlaps with ELLIPSIS, but has fewer 'rules'. Moreover, there is no need for the 'missing words' to be 'recoverable'.

Labels and printed instructions, too, often use abbreviated language; and here not only subjects but objects also are typically omitted, e.g.

Contains natural herb extracts

Avoid getting into the eyes

Other forms of abbreviated language appear in titles, notices, and newspaper headlines.

Compare BLOCK LANGUAGE, REDUCED clause.

2 **abbreviated clause**: the same as REDUCED clause.

3 **abbreviated form**: the same as CONTRACTION (2).

abbreviation

A shortened form of a word or phrase, standing for the whole.

This term is applied in three different ways.

abbreviation

(a) A string of letters—often spoken as such—formed from the initial letters of the (main) words of a phrase. Also called INITIALISM.

BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)
CBI (Confederation of British Industry)
ERM (Exchange Rate Mechanism)
OTT (over the top)
PCW (personal computer word processor)
UK (United Kingdom)

Sometimes the letters represent syllables of a word.

ID (identity or identification card)
TB (tuberculosis)

(b) A word (sometimes called a CLIPPING) standing for the whole, retaining at least one syllable of the original word.

ad (advertisement) (M19)
demo (demonstration) (M20)
flu (influenza) (M19)
pub (public house) (M19)
phone (telephone) (L19)
sitcom (situation comedy) (M20)

Clippings vary in their level of formality; *mike* (microphone) and *wellies* (wellington boots) are at the informal end of the scale. Other abbreviations are acceptable in formal contexts, e.g. *bus* (omnibus), *maths* (US *math*) (mathematics); or their origin may even be virtually forgotten, e.g. *mob* (from Latin *mobile vulgus*).

(c) A written convention which is unpronounceable in its shortened form. This includes abbreviations of personal titles, e.g. *Col.*, *Dr.*, *Mrs.*, *Sgt.*, etc. Also

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>St</i> (street or saint) | <i>etc.</i> (etcetera) | <i>MS.</i> (manuscript) |
| <i>Fr.</i> (French) | <i>kg</i> (kilogram) | |
| <i>Gk.</i> (Greek) | <i>rpt.</i> (repeat) | |

There are a few special written conventions for plurals:

pp. (pages) *MSS.* (manuscripts)
ff. (following pages)

Written Latin abbreviations are sometimes read out in their English equivalents, but some are only pronounced as letter strings, e.g.

e.g. (*exempli gratia*) (for example, /ɪ'ɛ' dʒi:/)
i.e. (*id est*) (that is, /aɪ'ɪ:/)
cf. (*confer*) (compare, /sɪ:'ef/)
a.m. and *p.m.* (*ante* and *post meridiem*: /æɪ,em/, /pi:,em/).

Chemical formulae and other symbols can be regarded as a special type of abbreviation.

H₂O (water) & (and) - (minus)
Fe (iron) + (plus)

Compare ACRONYM, BLEND, CONTRACTION, INITIALISM.

ability

One of the semantic categories used in the classification of modal verbs.

The term is particularly applied to the dynamic meaning of *can* and *could*. It contrasts with other meanings of these verbs such as PERMISSION and POSSIBILITY.

ablative

(*n. & adj.*) (In older grammar.) (A case) that expresses meanings such as *by*, *with*, or *from*.

This case, occurring and originally named in Latin, is not relevant to English, where such meanings are expressed by prepositional phrases. The corresponding semantic categories include AGENT, INSTRUMENT, MEANS. The nearest equivalent in English to the *ablative absolute* of Latin is the ABSOLUTE CLAUSE.

Compare CASE.

ablaut

(In historical linguistics.) A particular type of alternation of different internal vowels between related words or forms. Also called *gradation*, *vowel alternation*.

This term was taken over from the German philologist and folklorist Jacob Grimm, who used it in his *Deutsche Grammatik*, first published in 1819. It is a phenomenon common to all the Indo-European languages, which retains a functional role in English in the formation of the past tense and participle of irregular verbs. Several of the Common Germanic ablaut series are still perceptible in the paradigms

| | | |
|-------|-------|--------|
| ride | rode | ridden |
| drink | drank | drunk |
| speak | spoke | spoken |
| shake | shook | shaken |
| fall | fell | fallen |

Compare MUTATION.

The term is occasionally extended to cover *umlaut* or MUTATION as well, but historically the two are different phenomena.

See VOWEL CHANGE.

absolute

1 Used to describe the uninflected form of a GRADABLE adjective or adverb (e.g. *kind*, *soon*) in contrast to the comparative and superlative forms (*kinder*, *kindest*, *sooner*, *soonest*). The same as POSITIVE (2).

2 Non-gradable. See GRADABLE.

3 Used of the *mine* series of pronouns, contrasted with the *my*-type of determiners.

absolute clause

4 (In older usage.) Designating an adjective or verb when standing outside certain usual constructions or syntactic relationships, as:

(a) designating an adjective used without a noun as a nominal (e.g. *the poor*);

(b) designating a normally transitive verb used intransitively (e.g. *Have you eaten?*); and

(c) designating a comparative or superlative form of an adjective used without specific mention of a relationship (e.g. *I only want the best*).

1931 G. O. CURME The absolute comparative is not as common as the absolute superlative... *higher education*; a *better-class* cafe.

See also **ABSOLUTE CLAUSE**.

- **absolutely** (in older usage, as 4(a) above.)

1884 *New English Dictionary* In 'the public are informed', 'the young are invited'. *public* and *young* are adjectives used absolutely.

absolute clause

A non-finite or verbless clause containing its own subject, separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma (or commas) and not introduced by a subordinator.

A verb, if used, can be an *-ing* or an *-en* form.

The fight to board the train—the women crushed against the doors, the children desperately clutching their mothers—repeated itself at this provincial station

The platform empty once more, I settled down for the night

Except for a few set phrases (*weather permitting*, *present company excepted*) absolute clauses tend to be formal and written. If the subject is a pronoun it must be in subject, not object, case (e.g. *I refusing to go*, *Nicholas went alone*) so absolute clauses are sometimes called *nominative absolutes*. (This contrasts with the 'ablative absolute' of Latin grammar, where the comparable noun is in the ablative case.)

abstract

Used mainly of nouns that denote an action, idea, quality or state; contrasted with **CONCRETE**.

The traditional division of common nouns into abstract and concrete nouns is semantic. It therefore cuts across the more strictly grammatical classification into **UNCOUNT** and **COUNT** nouns, and as a way of trying to deal with syntactic differences is unsatisfactory.

The abstract label does fit many uncount nouns (e.g. *Everybody needs advice/fun/luck*; not **an advice/*funs/*two lucks*). But abstract nouns also include count nouns (e.g. *We had an ideal/another quarrel/better solutions*; not **We had ideal/quarrel/better solution*). Other abstract nouns have both count and uncount uses (e.g. *several important discoveries/an important discovery; a voyage of discovery*).

accent

1 *Linguistics*. The mode of utterance peculiar to an individual, locality, or nation, as in 'he has a north country/Irish/Scottish/American/French/German accent'.

Accents in Britain may be regional or social, the latter related to educational and cultural background. Linguists insist that everyone speaks with an accent, and that the standard RP accent (see RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION) is just one among many. Accent refers only to pronunciation and is distinct from DIALECT.

See also IDIOLECT.

2 *Phonetics*.

(a) The same as STRESS.

(b) Stress (in its narrower sense) accompanied by pitch change.

Loosely, *accent* and *stress*, and their associated pairs of terms (*accented*, *stressed*, etc.) are used interchangeably. But some phoneticians distinguish between *accent*, defined as including PITCH change, and *stress*, which is due to the amount of force or energy used to produce a sound, but which does not include a pitch change. By this sort of definition, accent can only occur on a stressed syllable (whereas stress may not involve accent).

See PITCH, STRESS.

• **accental**: relating to (phonetic) accent, particularly in the sense of word stress (rather than nuclear pitch).

1962 A. C. GIMSON The accental patterns of words are liable to change. Considerable changes of this kind have taken place within the last three hundred years, in addition to the large-scale accental shifts affecting French importations in ME. Thus, in the seventeenth century, and still in American English, a secondary accent with a strong vowel fell on the penultimate syllable of such words as *necessary*, *adversary*, *momentary*.

accentuation: the occurrence of accent (in the sense of pitch change).

1973 J. D. O'CONNOR Accentuation... is a feature of the utterance, giving prominence to those parts which are semantically important; stress is a feature of the word and is just as much a part of its shape as the sequence of constituent phonemes is. The two are certainly related in those languages which have stress as a word feature, even though it is fixed, because the features of pitch which mainly constitute accentuation centre around the naturally stressed syllable of the word to be accented.

acceptability

Of a language form or an utterance: the quality of being judged by native speakers as normal or possible.

(a) Native speakers may disagree over whether a particular utterance is grammatically acceptable or not. An individual's judgement of acceptability may be affected by personal, regional, or social background, by perceptions of 'correctness', and so on. For example, judgements differ over the acceptability of:

accidence

- ? You ain't seen nothing yet.
- ? She was realizing there was a problem.
- ? The house was building for three years.
- ? We convinced them to go.
- ? Either Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday would suit me.

(b) Linguists make a distinction between *acceptability* and *GRAMMATICALITY*, since sentences may be grammatically correct according to the rules, but unacceptable for some other reason. For example, a properly constructed, grammatically correct sentence could be so long that it becomes unacceptable because it is virtually impossible to understand. In this sense, acceptability is related to actual performance, while grammaticality is a feature of (more idealized) *COMPETENCE*.

Acceptability can extend to word formation. Thus, although the suffix *-ish*, meaning 'somewhat like', 'somewhat', combines with concrete nouns (e.g. *foolish*, *snobbish*, *kittenish*) and adjectives (e.g. *coldish*, *pinkish*), there could be degrees of acceptability as regards words newly formed with this suffix (e.g. ?*yuppyish*, **idiotish*, ?*trendyish*, ?**aquamarinish*).

• acceptable

1962 A. C. GIMSON Any strongly rolled [r] sound, whether lingual or uvular, is not acceptable in RP.

1988 R. QUIRK Characters in Dickens can use *an't* or *ain't* for 'isn't' without any hint that such forms are other than fully acceptable.

accidence

(In older grammar.) The part of grammar that deals with the inflections of words; the way words change to indicate different grammatical meanings.

This category traditionally contrasts with *SYNTAX*. For example, the differences between

drive, *drives*, *driving*, *drove*, and *driven*

or between

driver, *driver's*, *drivers*, and *drivers'*

would come under *accidence* in a traditional grammar. In more modern grammar, the term has been superseded by *INFLECTION*, which, together with *DERIVATION*, is dealt with under *MORPHOLOGY*.

Apparently *accidence* was an alteration of *accidents* (plural), used around 1600 to mean 'the changes to which words are subject in accordance with the relations in which they are used', translating the Latin neuter plural *accidentia*; although it is possible that the latter was misunderstood as a feminine singular noun and rendered *accidence*.

accusative

(n. & adj.) (In older grammar.) The same as *OBJECTIVE* (1).

A traditional term, somewhat out of favour today as far as English is concerned.