

REVIEW ARTICLE

A GRAMMAR OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH¹

Harold V. King
University of Michigan

The publication of this important volume fills the need for an up-to-date survey of the entire scope of English syntax. Though it falls short of a perfectly balanced treatment of the whole system, it touches upon all the essential topics and treats in depth a number of crucial problems of current interest such as case, ellipsis, and information focus.

Even the publishers' claims are vindicated to a surprising degree. The statement that it "constitutes a standard reference grammar" is reasonably well justified. Recent investigations, including the authors' own research, are integrated into the "accumulated grammatical tradition" quite effectively. But whether it is "the fullest and most comprehensive synchronic description of English grammar ever written" is arguable. No one acquainted with Poutsma's work would agree with that.

Very advanced foreign students or native speakers of English who want to learn about basic grammar will find some of the sections suitable for their needs, such as the lesson about restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses, though even here some of the explanations require very intensive study. Most of the chapters are rather like an advanced textbook for teachers or linguists. The organization and viewpoint give the impression of a carefully planned university lecture supplemented by diagrams, charts, and lists. A good example is the lesson on auxiliaries and verb phrases, which starts with a set of sample sentences demonstrating that "should see" and "happen to see" behave differently under various transformations and expansions. After the essential concepts are explained and exemplified—lexical verb, semi-auxiliary, operator, and the like—lists and paradigms are given as in the usual reference work. A particularly useful feature of this chapter is the outline of modal auxiliaries with examples of their divergent meanings.

¹By Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik. London: Longman Group, 1972. New York: Seminar Press, 1972. xii + 1120 pp.

It would be miraculous if a balanced logical scheme emerged from the efforts of four collaborating authors. What we have instead is something between a systematic grammar and a symposium of independent essays, with a certain amount of duplication and imbalance inevitably resulting. Chapter 13 gives an account of modifiers in the noun phrase covering much of the same ground covered under adjectives in Chapter 5. In Chapters 9 and 10, fifty pages are devoted to an inordinately detailed treatment of ellipsis, at the expense of more information on underlying modality needed in Chapter 12. These are matters of taste, to be sure. But the independence of the contributors shows up also in occasional contradictions and inconsistencies. In one place (345) "to live at a time" or "in a place" is treated as a linking construction and in another (43) as intransitive. Certain adverbial adjuncts are said to be "peripheral to the structure of the clause" (268) as in "I spoke to him *outside*," contrary to the definition of adjuncts as "integrated" (421) the very feature that distinguishes them from disjuncts, which are "peripheral in clause structure."

But then consistency is sometimes a reasonable price to pay for the benefits of diversity. We have for example three different analyses for the "arrive hungry" construction. On page 351: verbless adverbial clause; page 763: verbless supplementive clause in an intensive (i.e., linking) relationship; and 1016: "arrive" is a linking verb. All three are informative, and together they contribute to our understanding of the problem. Even duplication is tolerable if it illuminates a problem from different points of view. Chapter 5 for instance is rather methodical and Chapter 13 more speculative. The first provides basic linguistic facts. The other goes more into stylistic matters such as discontinuity, as in "The story is told that he was once a wrestler," an effect which is "difficult to achieve acceptably" and often "unwelcome" but can sometimes "correct a structural imbalance" or, in technical writing, "provide a noteworthy facility."

Some of the chapters are more like scholarly treatises than textbook accounts. A consideration of whether "the man for the job" and "the city of Rome" can be explained as transformations of "the man is for the job" and "the city is Rome" can be useful in a class where conflicting views arouse discussion. Much of the book is clearly intended to serve that purpose rather than the purpose of a reference source. In another place, "a," "an," "the," and the other determiners are not discussed in an elementary way at all, but a great deal of space is devoted to difficult and unusual problems like "the" in "the press" and the absence of a determiner in "by day." A serious teacher looking for help in ex-

plaining generic nouns will find out-of-the-way problems like "Venetian glass" versus "the glass of Venice" but none of the simple general rules on how to express "generic" in English.

The first chapter takes a quick look at some of the diverse meanings of the word "grammar" and then takes up the question of dialects and other kinds of variation within the language, including not only the usual geographical and cultural dimensions but also stylistic variation, the whole matter being presented logically and succinctly with well-chosen examples. Those choices of style which a speaker makes in order to accord with the subject matter are distinguished from those chosen to accord with his attitude at the moment. That is to say, even within a single type of discourse, say a political commentary, which in itself dictates certain modes of expression, there is still a range of stylistic levels from formal to familiar which the speaker may choose in order to convey his feelings toward the subject and toward the audience.

As for geographical dialects, it is worth noting that whereas the authors are keenly aware of the difference between British and American English there are really very few places in the subsequent chapters where they find it necessary to bring the matter up. In syntax certainly, the standard language is remarkably uniform in all the English-speaking nations.

The treatment of tenses and aspects is generally clear and convincing though it suffers here and there from an oversimplification of the verbal categories referred to as dynamic and stative (94), dynamic verbs being those which exhibit the usual pattern of simple tenses in contrast with progressive: "it goes" and "it is going." The distinction is quite rightly described as "a fundamental one . . . reflected in a number of other ways than in the progressive." But this two-way division, made use of at many points throughout the book, is not adequate to account for all the important aspectual constraints. For example, it fails to explain the awkwardness of "she arrived until six" compared to "she stayed until six," both verb expressions being within the category called dynamic (744, note a).

There is, to be sure, a further breakdown of dynamic verbs (95) but it is not exploited in the subsequent chapters, and the multiplicity of subdivisions obscures the important distinction between nonterminative verbs like "stay" or "hold" or "search" and terminative verbs like "arrive" or "seize" or "discover." The latter are sometimes called "accomplishment" verbs, or achievements, as opposed to "tasks." One of the places where this opposition could have proved useful is in explaining the two uses of the present perfect: "since then he has chased Ann,"

nonterminative, where the idea is "ever since," and "since then he has caught Ann," terminative, meaning at some instant during the intervening time period.

With "since" expressions, as with most of the other adverbials of time, dynamic nonterminative verbs have the same reactance as stative verbs. The denoted process or state can continue for a long or short time, as in "he worked on that bicycle a long time" or "he owned it a day or two." With terminative verbs, on the other hand, such as "he found it" a typical time expression would be "in a short time" or "it *took* a certain length of time." Though these are covert, selectional categories, not given morphological recognition in English, they are still important syntactically, and failure to give them proper attention makes it impossible to deal effectively with tenses and time adverbs.

An interesting example is provided by time clauses with "as" in the sense of "while" (752; 755). Clauses of this type ("As time went on," "As we listened to Bob," "As the people worked") generally have a nonterminative dynamic verb denoting an episode (not a habit or disposition) that unfolds by successive stages. Unless the verb after "as" is of this particular subclass, the clause seems to lose its temporal meaning and take on a causal connotation: "As she read very well," "As Dave lived on Eighth Street," "As he supported a large family," "As he owned that bicycle." Thus the ambiguity mentioned in connection with the sentence "As Dalrymple designed the engine, he must have realized . . ." (752) could be explained more clearly if there were a more explicit aspectual framework in the earlier chapters.

As even finer distinction is needed in order to account for combinations like "they threw him in prison for life" (502) or "put it away until we're ready" which are basically terminative but denote the transition to a new state which can then go on for some length of time. Admittedly such distinctions can be carried to a point where their usefulness is diminished to zero. Perhaps the only indispensable opposition, in addition to dynamic and stative, is that of plus or minus terminative.

Aside from the tense and aspect question, the emphasis placed on the dynamic-stative dichotomy leads to another source of confusion of quite a different kind, and that is the matter of volitional and nonvolitional verb expressions. In a sentence where the subject of the verb is really a voluntary agent represented as "taking heed," as Ryle would have it, in performing a conscious activity, the verb can be put into imperative and optative constructions, can be replaced by "do that" or "do what," can be modified by active manner adverbs and purpose expressions, and has all those features

that go with the agent relationship. It is essential to keep this collection of features separate from the purely aspectual, tense-and-time complex. It is quite true, as Lakoff and others have shown, that with certain kinds of verbs there is a linkage of some sort between the two collections of features. Verbs like "admire," "annoy," "frighten," "threaten," and "tickle" exhibit the usual contrast between simple and progressive only when they represent conscious intentional actions. And the same is true of many be+adjective combinations like "be fair," and "be serious."

But trouble ensues if we postulate that "dynamic" features and "volitional" features go together as a general rule, because it is then impossible to account for the syntactic behavior of what is now a large and important class of dynamic, nonvolitional verb expressions, including "disintegrate," "inherit something," "recover from something" and many more. Historians of the language have noted that the popularity of progressive tenses with nonvolitional verbs, an anomaly in earlier times, has increased markedly just in the last hundred years. And the question is relevant not only to tense formation but also to the syntax of adverbs, modal auxiliaries, and complementation. The acceptability, for example, of "he remembered getting well" and "he resented getting well" as compared to the strangeness of "he remembered to get well" remains unexplained if the rule says that "remember" requires "-ing" with stative verbs and either "to" or "-ing" with dynamic verbs. Such a rule would work only if "dynamic" entailed "volitional" as a general rule. But that is not the case. (See *Language Learning* 20.1-18, 1970). And the contrary evidence is more than just an occasional exception: "We're receiving a message; having a storm; turning blue; looking fine"; "the crowd was diminishing"; "the child is getting tall"; "the sky is falling." All these are quite normal in the progressive form but they exhibit none of the characteristics of volitional expressions.

Turning to the analysis of adverbial categories and functions (Chapter 8) we find an exceptionally detailed and informative description that interrelates closely with all the other elements of sentence structure. The subclassifications may seem exaggerated in cases where the grammatical significance is not made clear, as in the semantic breakdown of frequency expressions into definite ("annually") and indefinite ("customarily") with such further refinements as high frequency and low frequency. However, the serious reader will welcome the thorough treatment of "still," "already," and the other grammatically important adverbs of time. Special attention is given to adverbs like "highly," "rather," and "utterly." Here the notion of gradability is applied with particular

effectiveness in explaining intensifiers used with verbs as in "badly need" and "greatly expand."

In this chapter, adverbial expressions are classified according to their scope; that is, the way they fit into the constituent structure of the sentence. The largest division comprises all those adverbial uses that have their place within a clause (called "adjunct" functions) including those of manner and time as well as some of the more essential clause functions such as complements of place, as in "be here" and "put it here." This use of the term "adjunct" unfortunately tends to obscure the importance of separating the sentence functions into (1) the roles played by nominals and other elements closely connected to the verb and (2) the peripheral roles, or what Halliday calls "circumstantial functions," such as adverbials of time, manner, and purpose. The latter are optional modifiers as opposed to essential elements, in accordance with a distinction emphasized elsewhere in the present book, and it would be more in line with this idea of the term "adjunct" were restricted so as to apply only to modifiers, as in "sing it outside," and not to complements, as in "put it outside."

An interesting subclass of adverbials called subject adjuncts is set up in order to explain the relation between "anxiously" and "he" in examples like the following, a relation that is clearly not the same as that between "closely" and "she,"

Anxiously he examined the lock.
Closely she examined the lock.

Subject adjuncts like "anxiously" find their natural place at the beginning, as would be the case with a participial expression like "betraying anxiety," while ordinary adverbials of manner or means are more at home immediately in front of the verb or else at the end. And accordingly, in cases where the choice of adverb, say "mechanically," leaves it unclear, the word order can be used as a signal to suggest where the main element of "mechanicalness" or whatever, is intended to lie:

Mechanically, he threw the switch.
He threw the switch mechanically.

The first of these implies that the subject "he" was in a mechanical attitude, whereas the second suggests that the action was performed by mechanical means.

The more usual and obvious adverbial categories such as that exemplified by "Luckily, she didn't examine it" are also given considerable attention. One of the important facts brought out is that adverbs like "frankly" and "confidentially" constitute the

speaker's characterization of himself and his way of uttering the statement to which the adverb is attached. It is further explained that an adverb of this subtype can be attached to an interrogative sentence ("Briefly, why did you do it?") in which case the adverb may apply either to the questioner and the way he puts his question or to the listener and the way he is supposed to reply. These are "style disjuncts." The other disjuncts, called "attitudinal," are generally not compatible with interrogative sentences, though a few exceptions are noted. (To which could be added a few of the type of "allegedly" and "reportedly" as in "When did he reportedly escape?") To bring the bibliography up to date, add Peter Schreiber's article on this subject in *Linguistic Inquiry* 2.81-101, 1971.

Phrasal and prepositional verbs like "call them up" and "call on them" are treated systematically and succinctly in the chapter on complements of the verb. Both semantic and syntactic criteria are exploited in order to divide this complex matter into manageable pieces. A prepositional verb like "ask for" constitutes a semantic unit as compared with an accidental sequence of words like "stop beside" in "stop beside a wall." Syntactically, the prepositional verbs have the possibility of pronominal questions ("What did they ask for?") but not adverbial questions ("Where did they stop?").

The old problem of segmentation for prepositional verbs is solved by giving two analyses. Some say "look at the girl" is made up of the verb "look" and the adverbial phrase "at the girl." Others say it is made up of the prepositional verb "look at" and the prepositional object "the girl." The arguments for and against each analysis are set forth, and we are told that Chapter 7 follows one and Chapter 12 the other because their purposes are different. Disarmed by this candor, I hesitate to suggest a third expedient; but if we go beneath the surface structure and postulate a lexical unit "look at" which combines with a prepositional object "at the girl" we can neatly account for the choice of "at" in the prepositional phrase (dictated by "government" features inherent in "look at"). Then a general rule deletes the "at" of "look at" and yields the surface constituent-structure (look)(at the girl) which allows for insertion of adverbs like "slyly" immediately after the verb. This analysis, despite its telltale transformational or stratificational fragrance, would combine the virtues of both the others.

The final chapter, "Focus, theme, and emphasis," makes a number of important points not often treated in ordinary grammar books and makes good use of vivid examples to illustrate the general

rules as well as the special tricks of intonation shift and word-order variation. The region near the end of a clause or tone group is shown to have special importance as the place which an audience or reader will take to be the focus or nucleus of the information a speaker or writer is trying to convey. In the absence of emphatic intonation or italicizing, the final words in a sequence will be expected to embody the new part of what the sentence says. On the whole the delicate business of focus is presented very effectively.

There is a difficulty, however, in discovering what is meant here by "theme." In the stock technical usage of semantic analysis, "theme" designates the given, or predictable, part of a message, the part that can be assumed as background. Given a topic-comment configuration with the meaning "The man we're talking to makes tractors," it is the topic—in this case the whole subject in the English version—that plays the semantic role of theme. However, if we change the tone of this sentence a bit, putting special emphasis on the word "talking" and a low tone on "tractors," the semantic roles are reversed; it will now be understood that the making of tractors is to be assumed as part of the context; that is, "old" information, or in standard terminology, the theme. Some languages in this case might even put the "making-of-tractors" idea into the grammatical role of topic.

Most of this is just what our present authors have said, except for the terminology. They wisely use "information focus" for the place containing the new, or unpredictable, part of the message, thus avoiding the typographically precarious, though historically felicitous, "rheme." The confusion comes in when the term "theme" is applied to an interrogative expression like "which" in "Which house did he buy?" or to "Joe" in the sentence "Joe, his name is." This is exactly the opposite of current practice, and the confusion could have been avoided very easily since there is no need for the word "theme" at all in a discussion which covers the problem quite satisfactorily in terms of "given" and "new" information. Regardless of the terms, there is no way to explain pronouns, articles, relative clauses, or questions without at least the *concept* of rheme and theme, and it is encouraging to see the matter given the attention it deserves.

Terminology is bound to cause trouble in any grammar and this is no exception; but actually there are very few deviations from tradition. The parts of speech and the basic functions retain their familiar names. There are some new terms brought in here and there but not enough to create a burden. The "-ing" words are clarified in a brief survey of the continuous range

starting with concrete nouns like "a painting," through verbal nouns, gerunds and participles, to pure verbs as in "we were painting." The final decision is to abandon "gerund" in favor of "participial clause" for constructions like "(his) quietly picking it up pleased us." Among the small number of unfamiliar terms in the book are "prepositional complement" for object of a preposition, "intensive" for the copula construction, and "ditransitive" for a verb with both direct and indirect objects. Some of these less familiar terms will be welcomed as filling a genuine need: "putative" for the use of "should" in sentences like "It seemed odd that he should need so many," and "mandative subjunctive" for the subordinate verb in "insist that he stay."

"Mandative" is not applied, though it could be, to the hidden modality underlying forms like "to go" in "he was urged to go," in contrast to the factual or indicative modality underlying "he was said to go." The notion of underlying modality could have been used to much greater advantage than it is in the treatment of infinitives, gerunds, and participles.

Another fault to be noted is the lack of a systematic account of the parts of a sentence that can be made interrogative:

Which car did you catch him trying to steal?

*Which car did you wave to the man driving?

A few examples are given (397) to illustrate the statement that "there are clear and apparently arbitrary limits" to what can be made interrogative, but no general guidelines are set forth. A similar lack is noticeable again in the discussion of relative clauses (899).

It would take much longer to list all the good points. The variety of deep case relations expressed by the subject construction is vividly shown in a short space, with the whole picture summed up in an ingenious chart (358). There is a clear distinction established between "current" and "resulting" predicates ("be happy" and "become happy") which proves its usefulness in a number of other places; for example (1017) "catch them young" (current) and "wipe it clean" (resulting). Another convenient feature is the frequent use of charts to show the gradience apparent in cases that might otherwise be regarded as simple yes-or-no situations. For example, the so-called coordinating and subordinating conjunctions are laid out in a feature matrix (559) with plus and minus signs showing that the simple partitioning implied by the traditional terminology conceals important facts.

Under nominal clauses, special care is taken to demonstrate that "what" in "pay what you owe" is relative and not interro-

gative, and also that it is definite as opposed to the indefinite "whatever." Further advantages are the three appendices on word-formation, intonation, and punctuation; the bibliography; and the detailed alphabetical index.

Moderation seems to be the keynote throughout the book. It is up to date without being freakish. It avoids excessive abbreviations and symbols, but it brings together many of the fascinating problems that have received attention in recent research, such as the presuppositions latent in a phrase like "smarter monkeys than Herbert." It takes advantage of many of the valuable insights of transformational grammar; it makes good use of the style studies undertaken at University College, London; it owes a great deal to the structuralists' and more than anything, though not in an obvious way, it maintains respect for the classical tradition.

The book may cost twice what the average customer would like to pay, but it is an honest value both for its content and for the admirable results achieved in the physical production of a book of such formidable editorial and typographical complexity. As for the content, with all its debatable points, inescapable in a work with the originality of this one, it constitutes a genuine contribution to scholarship and a convenient source of information.