

**ENGLISH GRAMMAR: AN INTRODUCTION**

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Collins and Hollo state in the first sentence of the Preface that *English Grammar: An Introduction* (henceforth *EG*) aims to introduce English grammar to secondary and tertiary students. I would say that *EG* is more ambitious than what is suggested by its title and this statement, since it covers not only grammar, but also basic concepts of sociolinguistics and stylistics. Therefore, it intends to endow students with powerful tools for analysing texts from the perspective of syntax and also of genre, register and style. As is predictable for a book with such coverage, its orientation is functional: the treatment of syntax is mostly influenced by grammarians who work outside generative approaches, such as Quirk et al. (1972, 1985) and Huddleston (1984, 1988); the part on text and context has an unmistakably systemic-functional flavour.

*EG* consists of eleven chapters (all but Chapter 10 containing final exercises), six appendices of naturally-occurring texts (all written except for a transcript of an interview), a key to the exercises, a glossary, a section of references for further reading, and an index. The chapters are divided into two parts: Part A (Chapters 1-8) covers grammatical description, and Part B (Chapters 9-11) deals with text and context. Within Part A, the first two chapters are introductory: Chapter 1 concerns main concepts of grammar, and introduces the student to syntactic analysis and to the differences between descriptive and prescriptive grammar.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of word classes and the structure of basic clauses, i.e. those which display declarative mood, positive polarity, independent status (not coordinate or subordinate), and neutrality as regards information packaging. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 treat in greater depth the main classes of words (noun, verb, adjective and adverb) as well as the phrases they head, and also Prepositional Phrases. Chapter 6 covers clause structure and clause types; the non-basic types are described at some length. Chapter 7 deals with coordinate and subordinate clauses. The gap between grammar and text linguistics is bridged in Chapters 8 and 9: Chapter 8 covers the syntactic clausal devices available for structuring information. Chapter 9 focuses on the contrast between the complete sentences analysed by grammarians and the fragments commonly found in actual texts: in particular, six pages are devoted to minor sentences; the second part introduces coherence and cohesion, and the latter is developed; the former is treated in Chapter 10, which deals with factors that make a text appropriate in its context: dialect, register (including detailed descriptions of field, mode and tenor), as well as the functions of language in the sense used by Jakobson, and genre. Chapter 11 deals with text analysis from the top-down and the bottom-up approaches, ending with an analysis of an authentic essay from each perspective.

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The organisation of *EG* is, in general, adequate; as is unavoidable in a condensed book of this kind, certain areas have received scant attention. This is the case of transitivity, whose presence is limited to a few scattered references to types of participants such as agent, beneficiary and goal, and also of speech acts, which are treated unsystematically and with reference to isolated points (as in Exercise 6d, p. 108). Neither is non-assertion mentioned, but this omission is comparably less important in that its identification is not so crucial for a successful text analysis. The exercises, the appendices and the glossary are suitable for the students of the levels specified. As regards the section "Some useful references", a few lines on the contents and orientation of the works listed would have been very welcome; occasionally this information can be inferred from the titles, but the student is left without knowing the importance of each work within linguistics.

After this overview, I will make specific comments on each of the main areas of *EG*. The first area, namely the word and the phrase, is in general well covered. The type of syntactic analysis proposed, with minimal bracketing, is adequate for laying emphasis on the relationships between syntax and semantics, and between sentence and text; I will only point out that, just as in other minimally-bracketed analyses (Aarts and Aarts 1988; Halliday 1994), the head is assumed to be always an immediate constituent of its phrase, and no account is given of phrases which do not fit into this pattern, such as *only very recently*. Some minor objections could also be made, such as the following:

\* As regards the treatment of pre-head modifiers (pp. 57-58), adjectives and nouns are listed as possible realisations, but not Adjective Phrases or Noun Phrases, as in "a *very easy* exercise" or "the *red brick* building"; moreover, the statement that these modifiers "have the semantic role of restricting the denotation of the head noun" does not apply to the occurrences in which the adjective is used simply to mention an additional property of the noun, such as *lovely* in *my lovely youngest sister*.

\* Concerning the Verb Phrase, two comments must be made about aspect. First, the statement on p. 74 that English has two aspects, the perfect and the progressive, could have specified that this limitation refers only to the aspect conveyed by verbal forms. Other linguistic devices, or even knowledge of the world, can indicate aspectual distinctions such as habituality and (im)perfectivity. Secondly, the account of the present perfect (p.74) does not make it clear whether the situation concerned is presented as completed or not. I would suggest, in the line of Downing and Locke (1992: 373 ff), that the semantic features of the present perfect are *anteriority* and *current relevance* with respect to speech time. Anteriority refers only to the starting point of the state or event, which may or may not be completed at the reference time. If not completed, it is still operative, and therefore relevant, as in (1); if completed, the relevance applies to its consequences at the speech time (2):

- (1) These books have always belonged to my aunt.
- (2) Our friends have just left.

The treatment of the syntax of the clause is probably the main weakness of *EG*. The coverage of the simple clause in particular is insufficient. The obligatory clausal complements are simply divided into central (or "major") and non-central. The central complements are the Direct Object, the Indirect Object, the Subjective Predicative Complement ("This musician was *a genius*") and the Objective Predicative Complement ("Ann considers this musician *a genius*"). The rest of the complements have all been signalled with the label "Cx", which, then, covers an extremely broad range of constituents, from locative or temporal complements (3), through notional subjects in existential clauses (4), to certain obligatory infinitival constituents (5), to mention a few:

- (3) The conference will be held *in Madrid / in May 2003*.
- (4) There were *two nurses looking after the patients*.
- (5) The teacher convinced her best student *to major in Linguistics*.

In my view, this analysis is unsatisfactory even for courses with little time assigned to clausal syntax; moreover, the category Cx is also insufficient for stylistics, which is a serious drawback when *EG*'s overall purposes are taken into account.

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The analysis of the central complements is not satisfactory either. Its limitation to prototypical cases, together with the small number of syntactic criteria proposed to distinguish between different types of complements, leaves the analysis open for many peripheral cases which could arguably belong to one of the major types of complementation, such as (6-7):

- (6) Peter has *three dogs*. (Peripheral Direct Object)  
 (7) The manager is *under a cloud*. (Peripheral Subjective  
 Predicative Complement)

The analyses proposed for certain other individual clauses is also questionable, but I will not discuss them here for reasons of space.

Although the complex clause is treated in greater depth than the simple clause, the way it is dealt with also seems insufficient in several respects. First, *EG* does not specify that subordinate clauses differ from independent and main clauses in that they cannot select for mood. Secondly, within subordinate clauses, there is no distinction between the clauses called in other grammars *embedded* (8) and *dependent* (9):

- (8) *That he failed in the exam* was a surprise to most of us.  
 (9) He was sad *because he failed the exam*.

Had this distinction being made, students would have been encouraged to describe the semantic relationships linking the different clauses in given texts, thus paving the way for the study of rhetorical relations.

Another issue which deserves comment is the heterogeneousness of the main criteria used for analysing finite and non-finite subordinate clauses. Finite clauses are subdivided according to the function they perform within the main clause (noun, adverbial, relative and comparative clauses), whereas non-finite clauses are classified in terms of an internal property, namely the verbal form they contain (infinitival, present-participial and past-participial clauses). Collins and Hollo (pp. 122-123) decided not to classify the non-finite clauses in the same terms because they are not elliptical versions of related finite clauses (for example, in *He planned to take a detour* the verbal form does not specify tense, aspect or modality, and cannot therefore be paraphrased by *He planned that we would take a detour*). However, this lack of absolute correspondence does not seem to be criterial against classifying the non-finite clause as a noun clause, since it does not involve a difference in function.

The part concerning information structure is by far the best of those sections concerned with clausal grammar. The account of the many constructions available in English for structuring information in different ways is adequate for a book of

this kind. Nevertheless, the role of syntax and prosody in the assignation of topical and focal status to constituents is not treated systematically (cf. Vallduví 1992). Moreover, topicality is virtually restricted to topic continuity: no account is given of how some of the constructions described can contribute to topic introduction (existential sentences and locative inversion, for instance), or to topic closure (right dislocation). Objections can also be made to the syntactic analysis of some existential constructions. For instance, the constituent in italics in (10), which is clearly a constituent of the Noun Phrase headed by *things*, is treated as a Cx of the main clause; and on p. 148, ex. 8c, the sentences (11-12) contrary to what is stated in the keys, do have existential counterparts:

- (10) There are three things *I'd like to say*.  
 (11) Mrs Murphy is at the door. ("There is Mrs Murphy at the door")  
 (12) Three competitors are disabled. ("There are three competitors disabled")

The part on text and context is as a whole much better than the part on grammar. The students are gradually introduced to the main textual phenomena to be analysed in actual texts. Chapter 11 provides a summary of the contribution of lexical, syntactic and supra-sentential factors to coherence and style. For this task, top-down and bottom-up analyses are combined. The resulting method is a powerful tool, which permits students to perform reasonably deep and complete analyses of texts after a relatively short period of instruction. It must be noted that this approach to supra-sentential linguistics is restricted to the view of language as product, leaving aside that of language as process. This restriction is understandable, since the discourse-as-process view would be difficult to present in the kind of short introductory course that *EG* offers.

The main shortcoming of this textual part is, to my mind, that the contribution of pragmatics to text analysis is underrated. In fact, in line with much of the systemic-functional literature, the authors appear to be cautious about the use of the term *pragmatic(s)*, absent in both the glossary and the index. The unimportance of the role assigned to pragmatics is evident on p. 162, where the concepts of inference and indirect speech act, as well as Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, are treated superficially. Another clear example is the treatment of politeness. The description of the terms *positive politeness* and *negative politeness* given on p. 202 ("with positive politeness being defined as explicit use of politeness markers such as *please* and *thank you* and negative politeness involving strategies designed to "save face") is not clear, and does not fit the uses given to these terms by either Leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1987). Moreover, politeness appears to be used as a near synonym of indirectness

(see the table on p. 206); this equation is nowadays unsatisfactory since, as is common knowledge, too much indirectness may be impolite. In sum, the issue of politeness, if included at all, could well have been treated in greater depth.

To conclude, *EG* can be characterised as an adequate textbook for use in university courses of one academic year, in terms of its coverage, size and layout. I would say that it best suits the demands of students not majoring in Linguistics, since it offers a panoramic view of the subject and, what is more, it gives students an opportunity to view linguistics as connected with everyday life and therefore with their main area of study. It must be stated, however, that the success of a course based on *EG* will depend to a great extent on the skills of the teacher: concerning the part of grammar, s/he will have to offer solutions to the analysis of linguistic constituents of unclear status which unavoidably occur in naturally-occurring texts. In text linguistics, his/her role will be even more important: the synoptic view of all the issues, together with the fact that the correction is to be done in terms of "guidelines and hints" (p.181) instead of straightforward correct answers, can easily lead students to feel either insecure or overconfident, and consequently it is up to the teacher to set the balance between rigidity and openness.

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## Works cited

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