The Grammar of English

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> - **Textbook**: Huddleston & Pullum, *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar* (Cambridge University Press, 2005; referred to below as H&P 2005).

- **Reference**: As a background source (too big to buy, but available in the library), Huddleston & Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2002; referred to below as *CGEL*).

- **Supplement**: For those interested in writing and style, Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (a well-informed and interesting study of how to write well, uninfected by the usual nonsense about grammatical shibboleths).

- **Antitext**: As a small but ghastly example of what is wrong with the traditional work on English grammar, Willim Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (many people seem to love this horrid little book and will tell you to have faith in it; I think otherwise).

Introduction

This course is an introduction to English grammar that tries to make some sense of the topic. For about 200 years, English grammars have been plagiarizing each other's bad analyses and repeating a collection of confused nonsense. The tradition should have been jettisoned long ago, but unfortunately grammar proved attractive to a lot of people who were either highly conformist or distinctly incurious or both. A major conceptual shake-up was needed, but all we got was a procession of reverent repetitions of the familiar story. This course does not follow the tradition. It tries to provide the needed conceptual shake-up.

This iconoclastic aspect makes it easier for students in some ways and harder in others. For those who attend each class, the subject will emerge as refreshingly easy compared with traditional grammar, because it will make sense, and the way that evidence bears on it will become clear, and there is an appealing scientific side to the subject — investigation and evidence are relevant. There will be new terminology and definitions to take in, but not to an excessive degree.

On the other hand, a student who skips classes, and then tries to catch up by putting half-remembered previous recollections about grammar together with misunderstandings picked up from skimming someone else's notes, will crash and burn. Repeating the old 200-year confused blah-blah on the final exam will lead to a fail.

The course has an ulterior motive: to teach you to think syntactically. That is, to know how to reason about the ways in which sentences are put together, using evidence drawn from facts about the composition of sentences rather than their meanings. That difference will not be all that clear to you at the start, but will become clearer as the course proceeds. It is fundamental to any understanding of modern linguistics.

Underlying this is a requirement to think scientifically about the subject. Many people seem to treat it more like a body of religious doctrine, as if the rules come to us with an authority stemming from somewhere outside of our world. (It isn't clear where: history or morality or logic or 17th-century books or something.) The religious view assumes that it is our duty to obey the rules, not to analyse or question or test them.

Linguists, by contrast, assume that the task is to find out what the right rules are. Grammar is taken to be a subject for **investigation**, not obedience: we discover the rules by studying the facts of how the language is used. Used by whom? By the real experts: the people who speak it natively. Most of the students in the class will have advanced competence in English, and most will be native speakers, as I am. We are the experts.

Although it is always possible for anyone using their language (or doing anything else) to make unintended mistakes, the way English is depends ultimately on the way we, the speakers, naturally use it on those occasions when we said what we intended to say and phrased it the way we intended to phrase it.

The idea introduced in the previous paragraph is a rather difficult one: you are not infallible, yet in some sense the language depends on what you do. The record of the way speakers of English speak (and writers of English write) is our ultimate authority, yet that record does contain sporadic errors. There is a deep and important lesson here about normativity, and about why research in any behavioral science like psychology is difficult.

Outline

The first few weeks of the course will look intensively at how we assign words to syntactic categories ("parts of speech" in old-fashioned parlance): **Verb**, **Noun**, **Determinative**, **Adjective**, **Adverb**, **Preposition**, **Subordinator**, **Coordinator**, **Interjection**. It will also introduce grammatical functions: **Head**, **Dependent**, **Subject**, **Object**, **Complement**, **Determiner**, **Adjunct**, **Modifier**, **Marker**, **Supplement**, **Prenucleus**. Most of these can be illustrated by looking at the structure of simple declarative clauses. But we steadily move on to consider the structure of simple declarative clauses, and work up to more complicated and interesting ways of putting words and phrases together, including subordination (building clauses in as subparts of other clauses) and coordination (chaining phrases or clauses together with words like *and*).

The exposition follows the structure and assumptions of *CGEL* closely. *CGEL* is not necessarily correct, but it is broadly consistent and clear, so where it is wrong we should be able to identify what wrong turns it took. That is important: in an empirical discipline (any subject where factual evidence matters), it is much better to be wrong with clarity than to be fuzzily and evasively sort of right.

We will try to follow something like this schedule (no guarantees about the timing, because this course is new as a 15-week semester course):

| Week 1 | **General introduction**: Aim and structure of the course. Terminology, concepts, overview. Basics of syntactic argumentation.
● Reading from H&P 2005: Chapters 1 and 2, pp. vii–28.

Verbs and their inflection: Finiteness, auxiliaries, tense, aspect, modality
● Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 3, pp. 29–62. More detailed background: *CGEL* Ch 3.

| Week 2 | **Canonical clause structure**: simple active positive non-coordinate main clauses with no stylistic monkey business.
● Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 4, §§1–3, pp. 63–81. More detailed background: *CGEL* Ch 4 on complements and canonical clauses, and Ch 8 on adjuncts.

Nouns: Their definition and their main properties — the features count, number, gender, person, and pronoun.

| Week 3 | **Determinatives and the Determiner function**: Building noun phrases (NPs)

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 5, §§1–3, pp. 82–93. More detailed background: *CGEL* Ch 5.

NPs: complements, modifiers, fused heads, and pronouns

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 5, §§4–6, pp. 93–97.

| Week 4 | **Adjectives and Adverbs**

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 6, pp. 112–126. More detailed background: *CGEL* Ch 6, §§1–4, pp. 525–562.

Prepositions and Preposition Phrases: classifying words as prepositions.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 7, pp. 127–137. More detailed background: *CGEL* Ch 7.

| Week 5 | **Stranding of Prepositions**: clauses with gaps, and where those gaps can be.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 7, pp. 137–148.

Negation: the grammar of saying no.

| Week 6 | **Prepositions vs. Subordinators and Coordinators**: Introduction to content clauses

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 10, §3.1, pp. 175–176 and §4.1, p. 178; Ch 14, pp. 225–227.

Clauses with gaps: Unbounded dependencies and island constraints Open interrogatives, relative clauses, comparative clauses. Preposed items and the 'gaps' that depend on them.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 11, §§1–3, pp. 183-191; Ch 12.

| Week 7 | **Relative clauses**: Distinguishing integrated and supplementary relative clauses. Fused relatives. Ch 11, §4, pp. 191–192.

| Week 8 | **Non-finite clauses**: Raising and control. Predication and 'dangling participles'. Infinitivals and gerund-participials.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 13, pp. 204–224.

| Week 9 | **Coordination** Linking with words like *and*, *or*, and *but*.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 14.

| Week 10 | **The syntax of passive constructions** The many kinds of passive clause, their syntax, their discourse role, and the absurd story of their prescriptive denigration.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 15, §1–2, pp. 238–247.

| Week 11 | **Extraposition and postposing** Using a dummy (meaningless) pronoun to mark the spot where a content clause would have been so that the content clause can come later: compare *That she never said goodbye bugs me* with *It bugs me that she never said goodbye*.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 15, §3, pp. 247–249.

| Week 12 | **Existential and presentational clauses** Sentences with dummy *there*, such as *There is a god*, *There are staff available to help you*, and *There remains now only one thing we can do*.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 15, §4, pp. 249–251.

| Week 13 | ***It*-Clefts**: Sentences formed with a dummy *it*, copular verb, focused constituent, and relative clause: compare *The dog gave us the crucial clue* with *It was the dog that gave us the crucial clue*.

***Wh*-Clefts**: Sentences formed with a *wh*-phrase, a clause with a gap, a copular verb, and a focused constituent: compare *I'm going to give you one more chance What I'm going to do is give you one more chance*.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 15, §§5–6, pp. 251–254.

Week 14 **Dislocation and preposing** Sentences like *He's a nice guy, my brother* (subject kicked to the end); *This, nobody ever imagined they would see ___ in their lifetime* (object kicked to the beginning); *He had ___ with him a live alligator* (object kicked to the end); *Only later did I realize* (subject shunted to after the auxiliary); *On the top was a maraschino cherry.* (adjunct before the verb, subject after).

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 15, §8, pp. 255–258.

Reduction and ellipsis Grammatical ways of making sentences shorter by leaving stuff out.

• Reading from H&P 2005: Ch 15, §9, pp. 259–263.

Week 15 **Reading and review week**

Requirements

Attendance at class is required: be there. Homework exercises, roughly once a week, will be turned in at class. So that they can be difficult and provoke discussion, they will not be a major factor in computing the final grade (just 15%). Their main function is to force you to confront the issue of whether you are developing a command of the material. The homeworks must be done and turned in for inspection. Late submission will be treated the same as no submission. The worst single one of your homeworks will be ignored, which means that any single failure to hand in will not count, since it will count as your worst performance. Otherwise every missing homework will have to be justified in writing by a note from a doctor or a dean.

The final grade will be based mostly (90%) on a take-home final exam with several components, including elementary identification questions, open-ended analysis tasks, and short-essay questions.

Websites

There are a number of websites that anyone interested in grammar should keep an eye on. Both reading the new entries and browsing the back catalog will be useful. Language Log (http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/) is one such site. Lingua Franca (http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/) is another. Jan Freeman's wonderfully titled *Throw Grammar from the Train* (http://throwgrammarfromthetrain.blogspot.com/) is another. They will soon lead you to yet more.

Background

There is much more to be studied in the vast literature on English. What follows is a few suggestions for independent study and research.

General introduction and overview Read *CGEL* Chs 1 & 2. Also study Huddleston (1988), which is a detailed critical review of the earlier grammar by Quirk et al. (1985), exposing the shortcomings that led Huddleston to propose the writing of *CGEL*, and Culicover (2004), a detailed review of *CGEL* that relates it to current issues in syntax. While you are familiarizing yourself with important reference sources, you should look (if you haven't so far) at the magnificent *Oxford English Dictionary* in its latest edition, and you should try to find a copy of *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (or *Merriam-Webster's Concise Dictionary of English Usage*, which is just as good, and more recent). This truly superb reference work on

controversial points of modern English usage is one that every linguist should become familiar with. (It is often referred to on Language Log simply as *MWDEU*.)

Verbs *CGEL*: Ch 3. The 'dependent auxiliary' analysis stems from Fries (1952) and later Chomsky (1957). It is now widely recognised as wrong, and is rejected in *CGEL*. Huddleston (1976) offers a detailed defense of the catenative complement analysis of auxiliaries, in the process of criticizing Frank Palmer's book *The English Verb*. For detailed arguments that the 'auxiliaries' of English are full verbs taking clausal complements, *CGEL* pp. 1209–1220, Pullum & Wilson (1977), Huddleston (1974), Huddleston (1976), McCawley (1975); Gazdar, Pullum & Sag (1982).

Clauses *CGEL*: Ch 4. Beth Levin's book *English Verb Classes and Alternations* is a very useful reference work on subcategorization — the details of the complements that go with particular lexical heads. Keenan (1976) is an interesting attempt to provide a working definition of the Subject function on a cross-linguistic basis.

Nouns and noun phrases *CGEL*: Ch 5. For a detailed conceptual overview and defense of the fused Determiner-Head and Modifier-Head analyses that are introduced here, see Payne, Huddleston & Pullum (2007), where it is argued that all the dictionaries are wrong about *once*: it is not an adverb, it is actually a determinative, somewhat comparable to a word like *everyone* in that it has the special property of being required (not just permitted) to appear in fused Determiner–Head function. It has been claimed (by Abney 1987, unfortunately never published) that the head of a phrase like *the police* is the determinative *the* and the label of the whole phrase should be DP. This has become a very commonly assumed analysis. Radford (1993) departs from it by arguing that both *the* and *police* are heads. Payne (1993), however, gives some simple arguments that the best analysis has just the noun as head, and *CGEL* endorses that view (pp. 357–358).

Adjectives and adverbs *CGEL*: Ch 6. Jackendoff (1977) offers one of the most detailed attempts at studying the internal structure of adjective phrases. Jackendoff is also worth reading on adverb phrases, though (as the second half of Ch 6 of CGEL makes clear) he is quite wrong about adverbs not taking complements: a variety of *-ly* adverbs take the same PP complements that are licensed by the adjectives from which they derive. Intensive argumentation for the distinctness of the adverb and adjective categories, and a demonstration that they cannot be collapsed or regarded as complementary in function, is presented in Payne, Huddleston & Pullum (2009).

Prepositions *CGEL*: Ch 7. Emonds (1972) and Jackendoff (1973) are the classic transformational readings on the diagnosis of prepositionhood and the internal structure of PPs, though they are actually only reviving ideas first urged by Otto Jespersen in his *The Philosophy of Grammar* (1924), which is a classic you should look at.

Preposition stranding *CGEL* contrasts preposition stranding (*Who did you hand it to?*) with prepositing fronting (*To whom did you hand it?*). In the transformational literature fronting is known as 'pied piping'.[1] There is a rich variety of transformationalist work on the syntax of stranding and fronting in both relative clauses and interrogatives. And just about every usage handbook (like Fowler 1926, Evans & Evans 1957, Morris & Morris 1985, Merriam-Webster 1994) has an article with a title something like 'Preposition at end'; it is worth looking at the sorts of things these handbooks say.

Subordination and content clauses *CGEL*: Ch 11. A classic early paper on this topic is Bresnan (1970), which introduced the term 'complementizer'; *CGEL* uses the term **subordinator** instead (with good reason: subordinators don't always turn clauses into complements!); and *CGEL* claims subordinators are not heads. Later work in transformational grammar claims they are, so subordinate clauses are labelled CP ('complementizer phrase').

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[1]This whimsical term is due to Ross, and is suggested by the image of prepositions following fronted *wh*-words in the way that the children followed the legendary Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Open interrogatives *CGEL* Ch 11. See also Baker (1970) for an important study that opens by drawing a careful distinction between open interrogative clauses and relative clauses.

Relatives *CGEL* Ch 12, especially pp. 1058–1066. The vast literature on relative includes interesting vintage transformational discussions in Ross (1967). An interesting new proposal for describing relative clauses without no transformations was proposed in Gazdar (1981). Supplementary ('**appositive**' or '**non-restrictive**') relative clauses have been the subject of controversy; Emonds (1979) argues that they have no special syntactic properties', but Arnold (2007) disagrees. Fused relatives are often known as 'free relatives' or 'headless relatives' (the view *CGEL* takes is that these are inappropriate terms). One interesting transformationalist paper on the topic is Bresnan & Grimshaw (1978).

Non-finite clauses *CGEL*: Ch 14. The treatment of 'dangling modifiers' in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (or the newer paperback version *Merriam-Webster's Concise Dictionary of English Usage*) is well worth studying.

Raising & control Pollard & Sag (1991) present some compelling evidence that 'control' (the determination of appropriate understood subjects for subjectless non-finite subordinate clauses) has got to be a **semantic** matter rather than a purely syntactic one. Pullum (1991) presents a defense of the view that expressions like *his having won the race* ('nominal gerunds') are noun phrases with verb-phrase heads, but *CGEL* adopts a different view, taking them to be gerund-participial clauses. Both these conflicting views have some solid support, yet they cannot both be right.

Coordination *CGEL*: relevant part of Ch 15. The discussion of the Coordinate Structure Constraint in Ross (1967) and the reanalysis of that material in Gazdar (1981) make a very interesting study in syntactic theory.

Passives *CGEL*: relevant section of Ch 16, pp. 1427–1447. Among the huge number of treatments of the passive construction in English, the relevant section of Chomsky (1957) is of course classic. Freidin (1975) argues against the idea that passive clauses are transformationally related to active ones; Bresnan (1982) argues that the right approach is lexical; Keenan (1980) argues that the lexical approach is wrong and the right account maps phrases to phrases; and Bach (1980) offers a rich compilation of novel facts as well as some new analytical proposals. A cross-linguistic comparative view is offered by Keenan (2006).

Extraposition and existentials *CGEL* Ch 16. Extraposition is a term introduced by Jespersen (1909–1949). It was first treated in transformational terms by Rosenbaum (1967), a classic monograph based on an early MIT PhD dissertation.

Clefts *CGEL*: relevant sections of Ch 16. See Birner & Ward (1998) for a treatment of various information-packaging constructions, focusing mainly on the pragmatics. Ross (1967) is also a classic source on syntactic phenomena of this kind.

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