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A Review of Chapters 1 and 2 of Rodney Huddleston (1988) English Grammar: An Outline. ISBN 0521311527. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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Abstract **Review Article**

The book echoes the descriptive and theoretical developments made in contemporary linguistics and delivers a concise piecemeal explanation of the most imperative and fundamental grammatical categories of English and syntactic constructions. As the acknowledged global language, interest in the study of English language particularly by non-native speakers has witnessed an unprecedented growth in recent times. The dynamic nature of languages in general, particularly English, makes it expedient for scholars to continuously provide books and other instructional materials in order to keep the learner abreast of developments in the language. The book "English Grammar: An Outline" by Rodney Huddleston, is seen as an effort in this direction.

Keywords: Rodney Huddleston, code of best practice, English Grammar, Cambridge University Press.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the book, as indicated in the preface, is to provide an introductory framework for the study of English grammar at the tertiary level within the tradition of Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG). Transformational Grammar developed out of the works of Noam Chomsky as a reaction to Traditional and Structural grammars. It is mainly concerned with the native speaker's intuitive knowledge of his/her language. The Grammar specifically sets out to account for the native speaker's ability to judge utterances as grammatical or otherwise; and to account for his/her capacity to produce an infinite number of sentences, including those that s/he has never heard before.

The book approaches the structure of English from a descriptive rather than a prescriptive viewpoint – prescription being the hallmark of Traditional Grammar. Apart from its optically convenient typeface, the book introduces a useful innovation. This is the provision in the preliminary pages, of a two-page note on the symbols and notational conventions used in the book.

In Chapter One, titled "Preliminaries", a broad overview is provided about what the book addresses. These include a brief introduction to the three basic components of a language: phonology (which describes the sound systems as well as the prosodies), grammar (comprising morphology and syntax); and lexicon (which lists words and shows their grammatical behaviour and meaning). In addition, the book addresses semantics (the study of meaning) from the perspectives of phonology, grammar and the lexicon. Grammar however, remains the focal point of the book

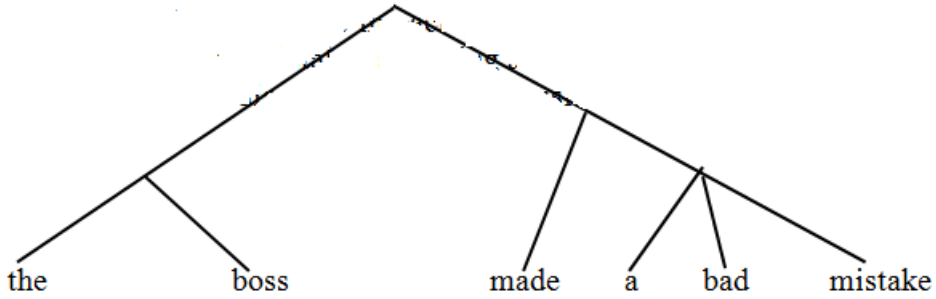
This introductory chapter deals first of all, with the relation between form and meaning in grammar. It begins with a subsection titled "Grammatical Categories: Definition and Prototypes". The author describes grammatical categories based on language-particular and general levels. He proposes that in English, words are not necessarily classified on the strength of the rules that classify them as such; but rather, on the basis of their grammatical behaviour. In the examples provided in 1 (i) and (ii) (p.2), the words "destroy" and "destruction" – obviously words of the same lexeme, are shown to exhibit divergent grammatical behaviours; the former being a verb and the latter, a noun. Both words are differentiated at the language-particular level by complementation. The Determinative which introduced "destruction" cannot do the same for "destroy" and that while "destruction" can occur with an adjective, "destroy" can only occur with an adverb. Consequently, the author abandons the

concept of notional definition – a characteristic feature of Traditional Grammar. This is however, applicable only at the language-particular level.

The author further distinguishes "prototypical" from "non-prototypical" grammatical categories. This is done so as to bring to light, the fact that although words may share a number of grammatical properties with some other words to justify their classification into a common class, they may not all the same, be considered as prototypes if some properties that are not common to them all exist. He uses as examples, nouns that take inflection to mark plurals and those that do not. The nouns that do not show number contrast are said to be non-prototypical with those nouns that show such contrasts. Grammatical similarity is therefore a matter of degree.

The subsection that follows the preceding one discusses words and lexemes (p.6). The reader is made to understand that words which exhibit similar characteristics are not of necessity, the same words. They may be forms of the same lexeme. They may thus be likened to allophones which are variants of the same phonemes as well as principal and subsidiary members of the same phonemes.

Subsection 3 focuses on Constituent Structure, Class and Function (p.7). Here, a sentence is said to be the largest unit of syntactic analysis while the word is the smallest. The author appeals to immediate constituent method of analysis to analyse the sentence "The boss made a bad mistake". Following the principle of Phrase Structure Rules, "the boss" and "a bad mistake" are analysed as the immediate constituents of the sentence. The sentence is then broken down into phrases, with the head element in each phrase determining its class. This produces three phrases: "the boss" and "bad mistake" surfacing as noun phrases whereas "made a bad mistake" is a verb phrase. The tree diagram in 6 (p.8) classifies the information according to Phrase Structure Rules:



Thus:

S → NP, VP
NP → Art (Adj.) N
VP → V, NP (PP), (Adv.), etc.

In terms of function, the sentence is further analysed into the SVO structure of English sentences. Thus, "the boss" is identified as the subject (the noun phrase) while the verb phrase "made a bad mistake" is the predicate. The object is "a bad mistake" while the predicator is the verb "made". Next, the concept of ambiguity is introduced and the reader's attention is drawn to the possibility of a sentence suggesting two different meanings. This reverberates the distinction between "deep" and "surface" structures [1] which was later abandoned in favour of "Logical form" (LF) and "Phonetic form" (PF); also overtaken by the most recent phase-based theories.

An introduction to "Kernel" and "non-Kernel" clauses is seen in subsection 4 (p.11). The three sentences provided under example (10) show that a Kernel clause is the equivalent of what is traditionally known as the Main clause – i.e. a clause that can stand on its own. A non-Kernel clause on the other hand, is one that cannot stand on its own – i.e. a subordinate clause. The features of a Kernel clause are summarised as follows:

- Forming a sentence on its own.
- Being structurally complete – that is, notwithstanding the presence of ellipsis; the occurrence of which may be implied from the linguistic or situational context.
- Being declarative and not imperative or interrogative.
- Being positive, not negative.
- Being unmarked in respect of all thematic systems of the clause.

In summary, the subsection tells the reader that there are different ways of saying the same thing depending on factors such as the background information at the disposal of the addressee and/or the need for emphasis or contrasts.

Subsection 5 (p.14) dwells on the study of meaning. The major issues addressed are proposition

and entailment. A distinction is made between a sentence and a proposition. A simple declarative sentence in English is said to be neither true nor false, but a proposition can either be true or false. This is because a single sentence can convey more than one proposition and a single proposition can be expressed by more than one sentence. Entailment presents one of the ways by which propositional meaning of sentences may be established. As the author illustrates, S_1 entails S_2; if S_1 is true, then necessarily S_2 is true – the truth of S_2 derives from that of S_1. A statement such as "Rachael was delivered of a daughter" for example, entails that Rachael is a woman.

Subsection 6 (p.16) focuses on morphology, that is, the structure and method of forming words. In English, the reader is told, the major word-formation processes are compounding, affixation and conversion. It must however be understood that other processes such as clipping, back-formation, coinage, etc. Yule [1] are equally important. According to the author, two stems (mostly nouns), are put together to form another word in compounding. Prefixes and suffixes (infixes are not attested in English) may be attached to stems to form new words. Conversion involves a change in the original class of a word, for example, noun to verb or verb to noun. It is further indicated that like morphemes, stems may either be free or bound. Similarly, just like there are restrictions to syllable onsets and codas in the phonotactics of English language, restrictions also apply to affixation. This explains why some affixes have low productivity whereas others are highly productive.

Furthermore, morphology is said to be either inflectional or lexical. Inflectional morphology deals with the production of variants of lexemes from their lexical stems (examples are verbs that take inflection to show past and past participle tenses). Lexical morphology on the other hand addresses the production of different lexical items (especially in the conversion of nouns to verbs and vice versa).

Chapter One finally examines descriptive and prescriptive grammars. The dividing line between both, the author explains, is that of goals. The former emphasises actual usage while the latter, the rules guiding speech and writing. The book under review, being purely descriptive, questions the wisdom behind classifying as grammatically incorrect in prescriptive manuals, the use of say, informal expressions in formal situations, for example "he knew more about it than me" in place of "he knew more about it than I".

Chapter Two is titled "Parts of Speech: A Preliminary Outline". In the introduction, the author identifies eight parts of speech, acknowledging the existence of a ninth – interjection – which he considers "peripheral to the language system". The listing of the eight parts of speech reminds the reader of the traditional ones: noun, adjective, pronoun, verb, adverb, conjunction, preposition and interjection. A closer look at Huddleston's classification however, reveals a different scenario because pronoun and conjunction are excluded. Pronoun is subsumed under "determinative" while conjunction is split into "coordinator" and "subordinator". As highlighted in Chapter One, the parts of speech are discussed from the perspective of "word class". This is because many words belong in more than one class and as such, the class to which they belong is only possible to determine from context.

Subsection 2 considers Open and Closed classes (p.23). Function words are described as open while grammatical words fall under the closed class. Open class is said to be so called because it admits new members but closed class does not. The author nevertheless holds the opinion that the closed nature of the closed class should not be seen as absolute.

Subsection 3 (p.24) talks about words and phrases. Phrases are said to be headed by words and it is observed that all the four open class members (i.e. noun, adjective, verb and adverb) and two among the closed class members (i.e. preposition and determinative) can function as headwords in phrases. It is posited that the headword in a phrase is dominant and obligatory while dependants are optional. A phrase under this classification may contain just a single word which functions as the head as opposed to what obtains in Traditional Grammar. Unfortunately, no examples are provided to buttress this argument especially regarding Traditional Grammar.

An elaborate treatment of the open and closed classes dominates the remainder of the chapter (p.27-33) and a discussion of possessive expressions (p.33) concludes it. Worthy of note in this subsection is the contention that in a possessive phrase, the clitic 's is seen as a word and not an affix since it enters into construction with a phrase, not a stem. In Traditional Grammar, it is considered an affix. The author concludes that not all possessive expressions are possessive phrases, citing *my*, *mine*, etc. as examples.

In conclusion, the first two chapters of Huddleston's *English Grammar: An Outline* serve as indispensable companions not only to teachers and students of English language but even to those outside the school system who value proficiency in contemporary English usage.

On the flipside however, the following points are noted which should be revisited in subsequent editions of the book:

- The contention by the author that "distinction between statements and closed questions is grammaticalised in English…but there are languages where it is expressed by a difference in intonation" and that "there are languages which

have no grammatical distinction…corresponding to that found in English between the open interrogative and the declarative" (p.5) without citing any examples of at least one of such languages is not very helpful to the reader.

- The rules for the formation of interrogatives from declaratives, though mentioned (p.12) are not stated and there is no indication that such rules are treated in any other section or chapter of the book.
- The author's eight parts of speech classification (p.22) fails to recognise the traditional conjunction but rather splits it into "coordinator" and "subordinator". These are not in any way different from the traditional coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Again, the classification ignores pronoun as a class: it is treated as a determinative in (i) vi (p.22) where it is used in an anaphoric reference. Though it is agreed that many pronouns can and do function as determiners, some can still stand on their own [2, 3]. It is therefore not clear where such pronouns fall under Huddleston's classification.
- Although the book does not recognise pronouns as a class of their own in the classification of parts of speech, they are subsequently identified and referred to (p.35).
- A few typographical errors are noted as follows: the use of the words "clean's" and "bank's" (p.7) is seen as an oversight. This is because the possessive forms of these words should not be used in such contexts. Similarly, in footnote 3 (p.27), the words "additional grammar" should read "traditional grammar".

It is hoped that subsequent editions will take care of these.

On the whole, *English Grammar: An Outline* by Rodney Huddleston is highly recommended to both teachers and learners of English language.

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2. Radford A. Syntactic theory and the structure of English: a minimalist approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997.
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