

English Grammar

Patterns & Choices

John P. Broderick

January 2005

For my students

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Broderick, John P.
English Grammar 2005
Bibliography

Includes index

1. English language – Grammar
2. Grammar – Modern, Systemic, Functional
3. English Linguistics

I. Title
PE 1112.B000 2005

ISBN 0-000-0000-0

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Preface

This book has grown out of my experience as a college professor of English linguistics who has spent more than thirty-five years teaching English grammar to future teachers. And whereas present and future teachers of English are an important audience, I would like to think that anyone with a sincere interest in language might also find this book enlightening. I have in mind not only professional writers and journalists, but also anyone who has ever been moved by the language as well as the ideas of a book, or article, or poem; anyone who has felt the power of an effective speech; and especially anyone who has ever felt the irresistible urge to write, even when school or work did not require it. At its conceptual core, this book is about language as a key source of such urges, as one of the defining characteristics of the human species, and as a rich and fascinating resource within each individual person.

The Grammar of English is as vast as the Amazon Rain Forest, and just as wondrously intricate and varied. Suppose you wanted to learn about the plants and ecosystems in that rain forest (an area comparable in size to the 48 contiguous states of the United States) and had only limited time to do so; how might you plan your learning experience? You could of course read a book or take a course. Even better, you could sail up the Amazon River for a few weeks or months, observing plants along the banks, and occasionally going ashore to hike through the jungle collecting and categorizing samples of plants along the way. In doing so, you would learn a great deal about the rain forest; you might even become a budding expert. But you would just have begun to learn. You would know nothing about thousands of species that scientists have studied, but which you had no time to seek out and observe. Furthermore, you would certainly not have learned anything about thousands of other species that haven't even been discovered or categorized yet by anyone. Nevertheless, you would indeed have made a good beginning, and if you were especially lucky, you would also have learned how to continue learning independently.

Fortunately, you will not need to make the financial investment that such a literal journey into the Amazon would require in order to take an analogous journey into the English language. This is because the vast territory of English grammar is right there inside your head as you read this book. You should think of this book not as a reference book or a textbook, or even a novel for that matter -- i.e., not as a book whose contents are primarily between its covers. Instead, think of it as more like a travel guidebook. Its aim is to have you look inward and observe linguistic phenomena there in the fascinating and wonderful terrain of your conscious mind. This book's relatively short journey through those vast and sometimes unexplored reaches of your consciousness, where the English language lives, will leave unmentioned much of the contents of several multi-volume grammars of English. Furthermore, there are countless details of English grammar -- patterns that you experience every day when you speak and read and listen and write - - that no grammar book has yet fully explained. But if I am successful as your guide, I will have pointed out enough grammatical species and demonstrated enough methods of classification and analysis that you can continue your exploration of English grammar on your own after you finish with this book. Then you should not only be able to read and understand the published work of professional grammarians, you should also be able to plunge into the lush foliage of grammar that surrounds you in everyday life and discover new patterns and categories for yourself. For English grammar is ultimately not a set of fixed principles, and certainly not a finite list of rules; rather it is a way of thinking, of observing, and indeed of marveling at the complex wonders of grammar and of that mysterious abode of grammar: the human brain.

For me to take you on that journey into English grammar, I, as a scholar **and** a teacher, have had to take a risk in the way we have written this book. Specifically, I have tried to bridge the

increasingly widening rift between scholars of grammar and teachers of grammar. In recent decades, scholars of grammar (scientific linguists) have become increasingly preoccupied with highly abstract theoretical models of language that require advanced training in abstract modes of thought even to begin to understand them, much less apply them to the analysis of unedited texts. As a result, most teachers of grammar who are not trained linguists have tended to keep on using concepts and methods of analysis rooted in traditional grammar – an approach that has had very little scholarly updating in decades. My goal in writing this book has been to rely on the practical insights of modern scientific linguistic research, but to express and apply those insights as far as possible by using traditional terminology when it is available and internally consistent. My first hope is that scientific linguists who are teaching introductory grammar courses will recognize that this book is indeed rooted in the findings of their discipline and will be pleased that I have found a reasonably efficient way both to teach their students a great deal about English grammar and to initiate their students into the discipline of linguistics. My second hope is that teachers of grammar who rely heavily on traditional terminology and who have little or no expertise in scientific linguistics will also be able to use this book, and, in the process of using it, discover that, with the help of linguistic research, I have provided more rigor and internal consistency to that terminology. I know, from the experience of using this approach with thousands of my own students, that it works. My firm belief is that both scholar teachers and teacher scholars can make it work for their students too.

Since, as I have stated, the territory of English grammar is so vast, there is no way that I could hope to “cover” it in a relatively short course book such as this. For this reason, I have tried to make the terminology we use in this book as compatible as possible with the most comprehensive and accessible reference grammars of English that are currently in use. Students using this book will be especially well prepared to look more deeply into grammatical issues by consulting the following two reference works in particular: *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (CGEL)* by Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik (Longman, 1985) and *The Oxford English Grammar (OEG)* by Sidney Greenbaum (Oxford, 1996). Throughout this book, when I use grammatical terminology that is specifically my own, I will point that out and try to explain why I think that the terms I have chosen are preferable to terms used by other grammarians.

The primary organizing principle of this book is a cyclic one. Chapter 1 is a self-contained overview of the structure of language (pronunciation / spelling, word formation, grammar, and discourse structure) in which the basic concepts of grammatical analysis (form and function) are introduced and discussed and exemplified in reasonable detail. Chapter 2 is a kind of second cycle, also in many ways self-contained, that lays out in greater detail than Chapter 1 the conceptual model of grammar used in this book. Chapter 3 is also in some ways self-contained. It cyclically revisits the notions of form and function from Chapters 1 and 2, but then looks closely at the internal structure of the most common phrase types in English, and defines twenty-tree parts of speech in the process. Chapter 4 cyclically revisits the notions of functional patterns and formal choices, but this time at the level of the clause. Chapters 5 through 8 examine a wide array of additional grammatical phenomena in English.

Most sections of Chapters 3 through 8 of this book (i.e., of every chapter but Chapter 1) will end with a subsection titled *Practice* followed by a subsection titled *Feedback*. I strongly suggest that all readers of this book at least think through the projects in the *Practice* subsections and then read the answers to, or commentary on, those projects that are given in the *Feedback* subsections. If you are a student using this book in a course, then you should work out the practice projects on paper before checking answers in the *Feedback* subsections. If you work through all of those chapters in this way, you should in the end be able to take any unedited spoken or written text in

English and analyze almost every sentence in it using terms contained within the covers of this book. More importantly, if you master the analytical approach of this book, you will be able to invent solutions to issues not covered here. You will be able to do this either by consulting one of the reference grammars I have mentioned or by thinking creatively and inventing both terminology and analyses that may not yet appear in any grammar book.

Because I spent more than ten of the last twenty years in various administrative positions in higher education, it has taken me nearly two decades to complete work on this book. But even when I was an administrator, I always taught at least one section each year of a course for which this book is intended. The current version is thus a much different (and I hope better) book because the experiences of so many of my students have influenced its form and content. I wish I could thank each of those students individually for the privilege of teaching them and for what I learned from teaching them. If any of my former students should read this Preface, please take the next sentence as a personal and heartfelt message. Thank you. I wish also to thank Cristina Leira, who worked extensively with word processing the text and drawing the diagrams in Chapters 5 through 9 and who wrote the first draft of approximately one-third of the entries in the Glossary. Finally, I wish to extend a special thank you to Alison Scheow, who carefully edited every chapter of the 2004 and 2005 editions, making numerous improvements in both style and format. Alison has also used this book in her own courses and has provided invaluable feedback for improving its content and organization.