A Student's Introduction to

English

Grammar

Rodney Huddleston and
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This groundbreaking undergraduate textbook on modern Standard English grammar is the first to be based on the revolutionary advances of the authors' previous work, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002), winner of the 2004 Leonard Bloomfield Book Award of the Linguistic Society of America. The analyses defended there are outlined here more briefly, in an engagingly accessible and informal style. Errors of the older tradition of English grammar are noted and corrected, and the excesses of prescriptive usage manuals are firmly rebutted in specially highlighted notes that explain what older authorities have called 'incorrect' and show why those authorities are mistaken.

This book is intended for students in colleges or universities who have little or no previous background in grammar, and presupposes no linguistics. It contains exercises and a wealth of other features, and will provide a basis for introductions to grammar and courses on the structure of English not only in linguistics departments but also in English language and literature departments and schools of education. Students will achieve an accurate understanding of grammar that will both enhance their language skills and provide a solid grounding for further linguistic study.

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Contents

Notational conventions

Abbreviations of grammatical terms

Adj	Adjective	O^i	Indirect Object
AdjP	Adjective Phrase	P	Predicator
AdvP	Adverb Phrase	PC	Predicative Complement
C, Comp	Complement	PP	Preposition Phrase
DP	Determinative Phrase	Pred Comp	Predicative Complement
N	Noun	Prep	Preposition
Nom	Nominal	S, Subj	Subject
NP	Noun Phrase	V	Verb
O	Object	VP	Verb Phrase
O^d	Direct Object		

Presentation of examples

Italics are always used for citing examples (and for no other purpose).

    Bold italics are used for lexemes (as explained on p. 15).

    "Double quotation marks" enclose meanings.

    Underlining (single or double) and square brackets serve to highlight part of an example.

    The symbol '·' marks a morphological division within a word or a component part of a word, as in '*work·er·s*' or 'the suffix ·*s*'.

    The following symbols indicate the status of examples (in the interpretation under consideration):

*ungrammatical	**Know you the answer?*
?of questionable acceptability	?*The floor began to be swept by Max.*
!non-standard	!*I done it myself.*
%grammatical in some dialects only	%*Have you enough money?*

Additional conventions

Boldface is used for technical terms when first introduced and sometimes for later occurrences too.

    SMALL CAPITALS are used for emphasis and contrast.

Preface

This book is an introductory textbook on modern Standard English grammar, intended mainly for undergraduates, in English departments and schools of education as well as linguistics departments. (See www.cambridge.org/0521612888 for a link to the associated web site, where additional information can be found.) Though it takes note of developments in linguistics over the past few decades, and assumes a thorough knowledge of English, it does not presuppose any previous study of grammar or other aspects of linguistics.

We believe that every educated person in the English-speaking world should know something about the details of the grammar of English. There are a number of reasons.

There are hardly any professions in which an ability to write and speak crisply and effectively without grammatical mistakes is not a requirement on some occasions.

Although a knowledge of grammar will not on its own create writing skills, there is good reason to think that understanding the structure of sentences helps to increase sensitivity to some of the important factors that distinguish good writing from bad.

Anyone who aims to improve their writing on the basis of another person's technical criticism needs to grasp enough of the technical terms of grammatical description to make sure the criticism can be understood and implemented.

It is widely agreed that the foremost prerequisite for computer programming is the ability to express thoughts clearly and grammatically in one's native language.

In many professions (the law being a particularly clear example) it is a vital part of the content of the work to be able to say with confidence what meanings a particular sentence or paragraph will or won't support under standard conceptions of English grammar.

Discussions in a number of academic fields often depend on linguistic analysis of English: not only linguistics, but also philosophy, literature, and cognitive science. Industrial research and development areas like information retrieval, search engines, document summary, text databases, lexicography, speech analysis and synthesis, dialogue design, and word processing technology increasingly regard a good knowledge of basic linguistics, especially English grammar, as a prerequisite.

Knowing the grammar of your native language is an enormous help for anyone embarking on the study of another language, even if it has rather different grammatical principles; the contrasts as well as the parallels aid understanding.

This book isn't the last word on the facts of Standard English, or about grammar more generally, but we believe it will make a very good foundation. It is based on a much bigger one, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (*CGEL*), written between 1990 and 2002 in collaboration with an international team of other linguists. That book often contains much fuller discussion of the analysis we give here, together with careful argumentation concerning the alternative analyses that have sometimes been advocated, and why they are less successful.

The process of writing this book, and *The Cambridge Grammar* before it, was continually surprising, intriguing, and intellectually exciting for us. Some think the study of English grammar is as dry as dust, probably because they think it is virtually completed, in the sense that nothing important in the field remains to be discovered. But it doesn't seem that way to us. When working in our offices and meeting for lunchtime discussions we usually found that we would have at least one entirely new discovery to talk about over sandwiches. At the level of small but fascinating details, there are thousands of new discoveries to be made about modern English. And even at the level of the broad framework of grammatical principles, we have frequently found that pronouncements unchallenged for 200 years are in fact flagrantly false.

We are pleased that we were again able to work with Kate Brett of Cambridge University Press, the same senior acquisitions editor who saw *CGEL* through to completion, and with Leigh Mueller, our invaluable copy-editor. We have constantly drawn on the expertise that was provided to *CGEL* by the other contributors: Peter Collins, David Lee, Peter Peterson, and Lesley Stirling in Australia; Ted Briscoe, David Denison, Frank Palmer, and John Payne in England; Betty Birner, Geoff Nunberg, and Gregory Ward in the United States; Laurie Bauer in New Zealand; and Anita Mittwoch in Israel. There are many topics covered in *CGEL* that we couldn't have tackled without their help, and this shorter presentation of some of those topics is indebted to them at various points.

The School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland generously continued to provide an academic and electronic home for Rodney Huddleston while he worked full-time on this project. Professor Junko Itô, Chair of the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Cruz, helped a lot by arranging Geoff Pullum's teaching schedule in ways that facilitated his participation in completing this book. And most importantly, we would like to thank our families, who have been extraordinarily tolerant and supportive despite the neglect of domestic concerns that is inevitable when finishing a book. Vivienne Huddleston and Barbara Scholz, in particular, have seen less of us than (we hope) they would have liked, and taken on more work than was their proper share in all sorts of ways, and we are grateful.

1 Introduction

1   **Standard English**

English is probably the most widely used language in the world, with around 400 million native speakers and a similar number of bilingual speakers in several dozen partially English-speaking countries, and hundreds of millions more users in other countries where English is widely known and used in business, government, or media. It is used for government communications in India; a daily newspaper in Cairo; and the speeches in the parliament of Papua New Guinea. You may hear it when a hotel receptionist greets an Iranian guest in Helsinki; when a German professor talks to a Japanese graduate student in Amsterdam; or when a Korean scientist lectures to Hungarian and Nigerian colleagues at a conference in Bangkok.

A language so widely distributed naturally has many varieties. These are known as **dialects**.[1] That word doesn't apply just to rural or uneducated forms of speech; the way we use it here, everyone speaks a dialect. And naturally, this book doesn't try to describe all the different dialects of English there are. It concentrates on one central dialect that is particularly important: the one that we call **Standard English**.

We can't give a brief definition of Standard English; in a sense, the point of this whole book is precisely to provide that definition. But we can make a few remarks about its special status.

The many varieties of English spoken around the world differ mainly in **pronunciation** (or 'accent'), and to a lesser extent in **vocabulary**, and those aspects of language (which are mentioned but not covered in detail in this book) do tend to give indications of the speaker's geographical and social links. But things are very different with **grammar**, which deals with the form of sentences and smaller units: clauses, phrases and words. The grammar of Standard English is much more stable and uniform than

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[1] We use **boldface** for technical terms when they are first introduced. Sometimes later occurrences are also boldfaced to remind you that the expression is a technical term or to highlight it in a context where the discussion contributes to an understanding of the category or function concerned.

its pronunciation or word stock: there is remarkably little dispute about what is **grammatical** (in compliance with the rules of grammar) and what isn't.

Of course, the small number of controversial points that there are – trouble spots like *who* versus *whom* – get all the public discussion in language columns and letters to the editor, so it may seem as if there is much turmoil; but the passions evinced over such problematic points should not obscure the fact that for the vast majority of questions about what's allowed in Standard English, the answers are clear.[2]

Moreover, in its written form, Standard English is regarded worldwide as an uncontroversial choice for something like an editorial on a serious subject in any English-language newspaper, whether in Britain, the USA, Australia, Africa, or India. It is true that a very few minor points of difference can be found between the American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) forms of Standard English; for example, BrE speakers will often use *She may have done* where an AmE speaker would say *She may have*; but for the most part using Standard English doesn't even identify which side of the Atlantic the user comes from, let alone indicate membership in some regional, ethnic, or social group.

Alongside Standard English there are many robust local, regional, and social dialects of English that are clearly and uncontroversially **non-standard**. They are in many cases familiar to Standard English speakers from plays and films and songs and daily conversations in a diverse community. In [1] we contrast two non-standard expressions with Standard English equivalents, using an exclamation mark (ˈ) to indicate that a sentence belongs to a non-standard dialect, not the standard one.

[1]   STANDARD   NON-STANDARD
     i a. *I did it myself.*   b. ˈ*I done it myself.*
    ii a. *I haven't told anybody anything.*   b. ˈ*I ain't told nobody nothing.*

We should note at this point that elsewhere we use a per cent sign to mark a Standard English form used by some speakers but not all (thus we write %*It mayn't happen* because some Standard English speakers use *mayn't* and some don't). And when our focus is entirely on Standard English, as it is throughout most of the book, we use an asterisk to mark sequences that are not grammatical (e.g., *Ran the away dog), ignoring the issue of whether that sequence of words might occur in some non-standard dialects. In [1], though, we're specifically talking about the sentences of a non-standard dialect.

Done in [ib] is a widespread non-standard 'past tense' form of the verb **do**, corresponding to Standard English *did* – in the standard dialect *done* is what is called a 'past participle', used after **have** (*I have done it*) or **be** (*It was done yesterday*).[3]

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[2] For example, try writing down the four words *the*, *dog*, *ran*, *away* in all twenty-four possible orders. You will find that just three orders turn out to be grammatical, and there can be no serious disagreement among speakers as to which they are.

[3] Throughout this book we use bold italics to represent items from the dictionary independently of the various forms they have when used in sentences: *did* is one of the forms of the item listed in dictionaries as **do** (the others are *does*, *done*, and *doing*); and *was* is one of the forms of the item listed as **be**.