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Thomas E. Payne
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Understanding English Grammar

Language is primarily a tool for communication, yet many textbooks still treat English grammar as simply a set of rules and facts to be memorized by rote. This new textbook is made for students who are frustrated with this approach and would like instead to understand grammar and how it works.

Why are there two future tenses in English? What are auxiliaries and why are they so confusing? Why are English motion verbs hard to use? Why are determiners so important in English? These and many other frequently asked questions are answered in this handy guide.

Student learning is supported with numerous exercises, chapter summaries, and suggestions for further reading. An accompanying website offers further resources, including additional classroom exercises and a chance to interact with the author.

It is the essential grammar toolkit for students of English language and linguistics and future teachers of English as a Second Language.

Thomas E. Payne is an international linguistics consultant for SIL International, and a Research Associate in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Oregon. His previous publications include *Describing Morphosyntax* (Cambridge, 1997) and *Exploring Language Structure* (Cambridge, 2006).

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A Linguistic Introduction

THOMAS E. PAYNE

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON AND SIL INTERNATIONAL

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Dedicated to students in the Hanyang–Oregon TESOL program at Hanyang University, 2004–2009

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Preface

The grammar of a language is a dynamic, constantly changing set of habit patterns that allows people to communicate with one another. For some reason, many in academia and language teaching seem to have lost sight of this common sense truth, preferring to treat grammar as though it were an object, outside of human beings in society, consisting of absolute categories and rules. This misperception has led to a deep tension between theoreticians and the practical needs of language teachers, whose students often come to believe that grammar is a tedious classroom subject, to be endured as a kind of rite of passage, rather than a key to the amazing world of human communication.

In recent years linguistics has begun to recognize the importance of language in use to general understandings of human cognition, communication, and culture. This orientation, combined with developments in computational technology, has led to more pragmatic, data-driven, theoretical perspectives as linguists look at the way people actually communicate rather than the ideal systems enshrined in countless textbooks of the last century. This book attempts to bring current linguistic understandings to bear on practical tasks, such as language teaching, learning, and translating. It attempts to balance systematicity with creativity, absolutism with flexibility. It takes into account the fact that grammar is thoroughly human, deeply linked with culture and identity, and stunningly complex.

I hope that this book will promote genuine understanding of English grammar by answering the "why" questions that students often ask, e.g., "Why are auxiliaries so confusing?," "Why does English make such a big deal out of determiners?," "Why are there two 'future tenses'?," "Why do my students have such a hard time using English motion verbs?," and so on. The principle assertion is that grammar can be *understood* and appreciated as a practical system for communication. This perspective has the potential to inspire teachers and students with a genuine enthusiasm for grammar, replacing the frustration often engendered by a more traditional approach.

This book has been written for, and in consultation with, students preparing for careers as English language professionals. Most such students around the world are preparing to teach English as a foreign or second language in TESOL, TEFL, or TESL programs. However, "English Grammar," "The Structure of English," or other similar course titles are taught in a variety of academic programs, including communication studies, journalism, linguistics, and applied linguistics, to name a

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few. A previous or concurrent course in introduction to linguistics or phonetics would be helpful, but is not strictly necessary as a prerequisite to a course that uses this book.

In the following pages are hundreds of examples from two of the major online corpora of English: the British National Corpus (BNC), accessed via the Brigham Young University interface (Davies 2004), and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), also accessed via the BYU interface (Davies 2008). Other data come from the Internet (searches by Google), the Internet Movie Data Base (www.imdb.com), contemporary literature, and from personal conversations. Invented examples are used occasionally, and are identified as such.

I have tried to choose examples that will not be offensive or sound biased in any way. However, because the examples are from language in use, they represent how people actually talk and write. For that reason some readers may question my use of examples that contain words and names that reference specific genders, socially defined groups (like football teams or political parties), products, or even specific well-known people, events, and situations. I ask the reader to please understand that the focus of the book is understanding English grammar. The examples illustrate linguistic points, and have not been chosen according to any political or other "agenda."

There is also a website available to support the use of this book (see www.cambridge.org/payne). On this website you will find several resources for teachers and students, including:

- an opportunity to interact with the author.
- additional classroom exercises and solutions.
- additions and emendations to the text.
- references to additional resources as they become available.
- errata.

I sincerely hope this website will contribute to the continuing value of the text to anyone interested in understanding English grammar.

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Typographical conventions and abbreviations

Typographical conventions

In the body of the text, **italics** are used to cite a word or other form as a linguistic expression, e.g., the phrase *a linguistic introduction*. Very occasionally italics are used for emphasis in the text. In examples, italics are used to draw attention to the part of the example that is in view.

An **asterisk** in front of a form usually means that the form is not a grammatical structure of English, e.g., **knowed*. An asterisk is occasionally used to indicate that the form is a hypothetical historical reconstruction that is not directly attested in any documents, e.g., the Indo-European root **ank-*.

The **frowny face** symbol indicates that a form is grammatical, but not coherent in the context provided, e.g., *Where are you going?* ☹*I AM going.*

All upper case letters usually indicate abstract features rather than actual words. For example:

Semantic features: The verb *feed* combines the semantic features of ENABLE and EAT.
Semantic roles: The semantic roles of AGENT and PATIENT.
Cover terms in formulae and diagrams: The regular past tense pattern is [VERB]+ *-ed*.
Linguistic abbreviations in examples from other languages: NOM, ACC, etc.
Occasionally, particularly in Chapter 15, all upper case letters are used to indicate contrastive stress, e.g., *BILLY pushed Johnny off the veranda.*

Initial upper case letters are used for syntactic functions, e.g., Modification/Modifier, Inflection, Complement, Head. This distinguishes syntactic functions from syntactic categories, e.g., noun, verb, noun phrase, clause.

Small caps are used for technical terms at their first occurrence. These terms all appear in the glossary. For example: *The verb* be *is notoriously* SUPPLETIVE *in English.*

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Abbreviations

1SG	First person singular (*I*, *me*)
2SG	Second person singular (*you*)
ACC	Accusative case
ADJ	Adjective
AdjP	Adjective phrase
ADV	Adverb
AdvP	Adverb phrase
ART	Article
AUX	Auxiliary
BNC	British National Corpus (Davies 2004)
C	Complement
CAUSE	Causative
COCA	Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008)
CONJ	Conjunction
CP	Complement phrase
CSE	Contemporary Standard English
CTP	Complement-taking predicator
D	Determiner
DAT	Dative
DECL	Declarative
DP	Determined noun phrase (or determiner phrase)
GP	Genitive phrase
GR	Grammatical relation
H	Head
Incorp	Incorporated element
INF	Infinitive
INFL	Inflection
IP	Inflected verb phrase (or inflectional phrase)
L1	The first language a child acquires – the "mother tongue"
L2	Any language learned after L1 is acquired.
MKR	Marker of comparison
MOD	Modifier
N	Noun
NICE	Negation, Inversion, Code (tag questions), and Emphasis
NOM	Nominative case
NP	Noun phrase
O	(Direct) Object

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OC	Object Complement
OV	Object+Verb constituent order
P	Preposition
PAST	Past tense
PDQ	Predeterminer quantifier
POSTP	Postposition
PP	Prepositional phrase
PREP	Preposition
PRES	Present tense
PRO	Pronoun
Q	Quantifier
S	Clause (also "Subject" in Chapter 2)
SC	Subject Complement
SLL	Second language learner
SR	Semantic role
STD	Standard of comparison
TAM	Tense, Aspect, and Mode
V	Verb
VO	Verb+Object constituent order
VP	Verb phrase

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