INTRODUCTION

The *Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar* is designed for people who want to understand grammatical terms and concepts while not being specialists in grammar. That includes classroom teachers of English who grapple with grammatical terms and concepts as part of language pedagogy, and who need especially to decode the newer terms which are gradually replacing those of traditional grammar. Teachers in training need help with grammar terms of all kinds. Their schooling may not have included much formal grammar, but their undergraduate reading may well take them over the border between language pedagogy and linguistic research. They need a ready reference to find out where both older and newer grammatical terms come from, to understand their significance in language development, and their potential use in teaching English to first or second language learners.

Others whom this dictionary will serve are university students in English linguistics. For them grammar is not necessarily a central interest, though it impinges on various subdisciplines of linguistics, including discourse and conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, corpus linguistics. And of course it will allow anyone who has learned grammar in the past to keep up to date with present-day developments in English grammar. Those interested in the passionate public debates about the rights and wrongs of English usage will be able to interpret them from an independent grammatical perspective, and respond to the "grammar grouches."

Coverage of grammatical terms and concepts

Since WWII and around the turn of the millennium, English has seen an explosion of fresh accounts of grammar and new grammatical paradigms. Grammatical researchers in most quarters of the English-speaking world have contributed, in some remarkable collaborations: between scholars in Britain and on the Continent in Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik's *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985); and between those on both sides of the Atlantic with Biber, Leech, Johansson, Conrad, and Finegan's *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999). Scholars from southern and northern hemispheres were involved in Huddleston, Pullum and a team of other authors in the *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002); and there was cross-hemispheric collaboration in Halliday and Matthiessen's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2004).

These major millennial grammars have been taken as the reference set for this book, because they have influenced and will continue to influence grammatical thinking. They embrace different approaches to English grammar, giving different weight to syntactic and semantic criteria in their analyses, and to the interplay between grammar and discourse. Their respective terminologies and different perspectives on grammatical categories and concepts are discussed in many entries. Other grammatical paradigms and theories, from traditional grammar through structural and transformational–generative grammars to government–binding and lexicalism, are recognized with individual entries and mentioned elsewhere as relevant.

New terms and adaptation of older terms

Each of the millennial grammars contains much new terminology beyond that of traditional grammar, and as used in English dictionaries. All modern grammars recognize the need to find terms for grammatical functions to use alongside those of the traditional word classes. Thus *modifier* serves for the conventional function of *adjectives* and other words appearing prior to a noun, and *adjective* can be reserved strictly for words belonging to the class. Likewise *adjunct* is used for the adverbial function that may be embodied in adverbs or adverbial and prepositional phrases. Whole new word classes, e.g. *determiner*, are created out of subsets of older word classes, including numerals from the adjective class, demonstrative pronouns as used in *this/that book*, and the possessive forms of personal pronouns: *my*, *your*, *our*, *his*, *her*, etc. What were formerly *conjunctions* are now distinguished as *coordinators* and *subordinators*, along with post-traditional analysis of the various types of *coordination* and *subordination* (or *parataxis/hypotaxis*). Subclasses of *nouns* (*count* vs. *mass*) are identified by their behavior in the noun phrase, and subclasses of *verbs* (*auxiliary*, *copular*, *catenative*), on grounds of their syntax. But modern grammarians do not always agree on the constitution of word classes, their subclasses, and subsets, and the differences in their scoping of terms need to be discussed.

Apart from the mix of newly coined grammatical terms and repurposing of older ones, the *Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar* includes entries on phrases that mark the traditional concerns of prescriptive grammarians and usage pundits, e.g. *absolute*, *double negative*, *fused participle*, *split infinitive*. Such terms identify pressure points of English grammar which are of ongoing interest – grammatical ambiguities and anomalies which are now better understood, and recognized as natural sites for variable usage.

Terms of grammar and related areas of linguistics

The terms included in the *Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar* are drawn primarily from the areas of syntax and morphology as relevant to modern English grammar, but also from lexical semantics, orthography, and punctuation. Key

terms and concepts relating to information delivery and pragmatic aspects
of communication are included, with reference to written as well as spoken
discourse.

The topics raised by any given grammatical term are multifaceted, and the
cross-references supplied should help to show how interconnected grammar is
with language and communication at large. Readers are invited to take advantage
of the cross-references to reinforce their grammatical knowledge, and to enjoy
the interconnections.

Access to entries and their contents

The alphabetical organization of this book allows readers ready access to
hundreds of grammatical terms and their best-known alternatives. The
alternatives are cross-referenced to the major term, decided as far as possible by
consensus among the four millennial grammars introduced above. Except for
entries which are simple cross-references, each provides at least some
identification of the term, with more or less extended discussion – much
more than a standard one-sentence glossary.

Many entries in the *Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar* have a table
up front listing the various meanings and applications of a term, and the
different analytical perspectives put upon it. This helps to separate the older
meaning(s) inherited from traditional grammar, and to show the term's fresh
applications in modern grammars, as for *verb phrase*. Itemizing the alternative
meanings is crucial where older terms are assigned to now recognized oppositions
in syntax, e.g. the use of *modifier* to refer to optional dependencies and
complement to obligatory ones.

Each application of the term is explained in accordance with the grammar(s)
to which it belongs. Where there are very individual uses of terms, e.g. the
use of *complement* in systemic–functional grammar, their unusualness is noted
for the benefit of readers. But the dictionary aims to describe alternative
conceptualizations of English grammar, not to pass judgment on them.

Most terms and concepts are illustrated with examples from natural language,
as part of their identification and explanation. The examples are as regionally
and stylistically neutral as possible, so as to be transparent to readers
everywhere.

Corpus evidence and emergent grammar

The *Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar* makes use of data from corpus-based
grammars, especially Biber et al. (1999), and other corpus-based research
studies on individual topics of grammar. This data allows us to review the status
and frequency of grammatical constructions in different regional varieties of
English, as well as different registers and styles. Corpus data is used also to
document the relative frequency of grammatical alternants, such as *will* and

shall, and the use of *not* versus *no* negation, where the first has become the dominant form in each case.

The changing relationships between alternatives like those draw attention to the way in which grammar is continually evolving, allowing new lexemes to replace older ones within the system, and new grammatical units such as complex prepositions and complex conjunctions to grammaticalize out of other elements of the lexicogrammar. They are all part of the emergent grammar of English which need to be documented at the turn of the third millennium.

Acknowledgments

A

A

In syntactic analysis this capital letter is the symbol for any obligatory *adjunct* of the verb, or other *adverbial* constituent of the clause. See further under **adjunct**, sections 2, 3, and 4; *adverbial*, sections 1 and 2; and **clause**, section 1.

A/AN

These are the two forms of the *indefinite article*, which serve as *determiner* for an indefinite noun phrase, as underlined in:

We saw a man riding a unicycle through the forest.
Let's make it an evening at the opera in Sydney.

As in those examples, the indefinite article does not undertake to define the referent for the context. Rather it introduces a topic for further discussion. See further under **determiner**, section 1; and **given and new.**

The choice between *A* and *AN* depends on the first *sound* of the following word. If the word begins with a consonant sound (as does "man"), *A* is the form to use. If it begins with a vowel sound (as does "evening"), *AN* is normally used. Note that the word "unicycle" begins with a consonant sound "y," and is therefore prefaced by *A*. The fact that the spelling of "unicycle" begins with a vowel letter is immaterial. This principle also applies in cases like "an hour" (because "hour" begins with a vowel sound), and "a history book" (because "history" begins with a consonant sound).

ablative absolute

In Latin grammar, the **ablative absolute** construction could stand within a clause while grammatically independent of it. Its independence is shown by the fact that all inflectable items in it (nouns, adjectives, etc.) are in the *ablative case*. Thus both words in the Latin tag *deo volente* ("God willing") are in their ablative form. As the translation shows, its English counterpart (a nonfinite clause) can be used in much the same way, though there is no distinctive case marking to separate it from the rest of the sentence. See further under **absolute**, section 4; and **clause**, section 5.

ablative case

This is one of the six *cases* of nouns present in Latin grammar, but not in modern English. It marked a noun as having the meaning "by," "with," or "from" within the clause, often in relation to the verb. In Latin the *ablative* singular

ending for various classes of noun was -*o*, and thus *ipso facto* means "by that same fact." See further under **case**, section 1.

absolute

1 **absolute adjective: three applications of the term**
2 **absolute verb**
3 **absolute pronoun**
4 **absolute construction**

This word has been applied in multiple ways in English grammar, in relation to adjectives, verbs, pronouns, and constructions such as nonfinite clauses. Because of this, modern English grammarians generally avoid it. Yet older applications of **absolute** are still to be found in traditional grammar and in reference books that draw on it.

1 **Absolute adjective: three applications of the term**
   • as a name for the base form in the *degrees of comparison*, for adjectives that can also be made comparative or superlative. Thus *big* is the ***absolute form*** for *bigger* and *biggest*. See further under **adjective**, section 3.
   • as the traditional term for ***nongradable adjectives*** which do not permit any degrees of comparison. These include those which refer to the extreme points on a notional scale, e.g. *first*, *initial*, *primary*, and *final*, *last*, *ultimate*, as well as the notional midpoint, such as *medium*, *mediocre*. Others of the same type are:

complete	*countless*	*eternal*	*fatal*	*impossible*
infinite	*paramount*	*perfect*	*permanent*	*previous*
simultaneous	*supreme*	*total*	*unique*	*universal*

There are in fact many other nongradable adjectives, including defining and classificatory adjectives:

absolute	*auxiliary*	*classic*	*horizontal*	*ivory*
second-hand	*unprecedented*			

By their nature, these adjectives put something into a specific class (or a class of its own), which is by definition not to be compared. The most notorious ***absolute adjective*** is *unique*, but it is only contentious for those who insist that it has only a nongradable meaning. Large modern dictionaries recognize that it has both gradable and nongradable meanings.
   • to refer to adjectives that serve as the head of a noun phrase. Fowler (**1926**) called this the ***absolute use*** of adjectives as nouns, for example:

the brave	*the elderly*	*the rich*	*the underprivileged*
the very young	*the young at heart*		

As the last two examples show, these noun-like adjectives can still be premodified by *very*, and can also be postmodified like nouns. They are normally prefaced by *the* and always construed in the plural when they refer to a category

of human being, despite the absence of plural marking. The same applies to adjectives of nationality which end in a sibilant sound, e.g.

the Dutch   the English   the French   the Spanish

Yet when the absolute adjective refers to an abstract concept, e.g. *the nude* as an subject of art, it is construed in the singular:

   The nude has been a recurrent artistic genre for centuries.

➤ Note that in modern grammars these adjective-headed noun phrases are referred to as *zero-headed* NPs. See further under **fused head**.

2 **Absolute verb**
This term was applied by Fowler (**1926**) to verbs which, though normally transitive, appear without a following object or adjunct. Compare the uses of "write" in:

   We asked them to write a letter but they never wrote.

See further under **transitivity**, section 1.

3 **Absolute pronoun**
This term is used in some grammars such as Huddleston (**1984**) for the type of possessive pronoun, e.g. *MINE*, *HERS*, *OURS*, which stands as the head of a noun phrase. Most grammarians now call them *independent pronouns*. See further under **possessive pronoun**.

4 **Absolute construction**
Grammatical constructions are termed **absolute** when they are an independent structure within the syntax of the clause. They are typically nonfinite clauses appearing as the first constituent in the following:

   All things considered, they were pretty well off.
   That being so, I will put in an application.

Examples such as those are commonplaces of English discourse, often used for cohesive purposes to connect with a series of previous statements (see further under **cohesion**). Those created ad hoc by writers caught up in their narrative are sometimes castigated as *dangling participles* or *unattached phrases* (see further under **dangling participle**).
   Absolute constructions were an accepted component of the clause in Latin grammar: see **ablative absolute**.

accusative
This term was taken over from Latin grammar by the first English grammarians in C17, to refer to the *case* of the object of a verb or preposition. In Latin and other languages, nouns typically carry a special *inflection* to show their case and thus their role within the clause or phrase. But in modern English, nouns have no special ending to distinguish object from subject: they are the same whether *the dog bit the man*, or *the man bit the dog*. The accusative case is only visible for English personal pronouns, as in *I love him* and *He loves me*.
   With the lack of accusative inflections for modern English nouns, plus the fact that their function as *object* is only to be seen in their syntactic position

(following verb or preposition), grammarians such as Quirk et al. (**1985**) prefer to refer to the **accusative** as the *objective case*. Others such as Biber et al. (**1999**), and Huddleston and Pullum (**2002**) retain the term **accusative** where they refer to the distinctive case forms of the English personal pronouns. The downside is that the accusative forms of pronouns are then the ones used in English for direct as well as indirect objects (whose case in traditional grammar terms is the *dative*). See further under **case**, section 1; **inflection**, **object**, and **objective case**.

➤ See also **oblique**, sections 1 and 2.

acronym

A word or name formed out of the initial letters of a phrase is often called an **acronym**, e.g. *AIDS* ("auto-immune deficiency syndrome"), *WASP* "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant"). In most cases, the acronym contains the first letter of each contributing word, though occasionally it involves the first two or three letters. For example, *modem* is an acronym formed from "modulator" and "demodulator." The letters of an acronym may form one or more syllables, as in the examples above. Those whose letters generate words that conform to the phonotactic and orthographic patterns of English may come to be written in lower case (as with *laser, scuba*) and become words of the common language. Yet very few new words are formed by *acronymy:* it is the least common form of abbreviation (see further under **clipping**).

The term **acronym** is often extended to words and names formed out of the initial letters of a phrase, each of which is pronounced as a separate syllable, e.g. *IOU, IQ, IT, KO*. They may also be distilled out of a polysyllabic word, as with *PJs* from "pajamas," *TV* from "television." Those who prefer to distinguish these formations from the "true" acronym refer to this second type as an *initialism* or *alphabetism*. Some of them, e.g. *UFO*, are more often found as acronyms than in their full form ("unidentified flying object"). They are of course very frequent as abbreviations for multiword proper names, e.g. *BBC, UNESCO, WHO*.

active voice

See under **voice (1)**.

adjacency pair

This term refers to one of the essential structures of dialogue, i.e. a pair of turns, the first of which is a stimulus in the form of a question or proposal to initiate a topic; and the second a response to it:

Would you like a drink?
                No thanks, I've just had coffee.
Let's get down to business then.
                That's my reason for being here.

Adjacency pairs make use of interactive syntax (e.g. the interrogative formulation for a polite offer *would you like*; and the inclusive first person imperative *let's*).

These are the stuff of ordinary social conversation, with one speaker and another articulating a topic to get the exchange going and contribute to the conversational momentum. They express both the ***interpersonal*** function of language and an aspect of the ***textual*** function. See further under **metafunction of language**.

adjectival clause

See **relative clause**.

adjectival group

See under **adjectival phrase**.

adjectival phrase (AdjP, AP)

This is a phrase type headed by an adjective. In traditional grammar, the **adjectival phrase** was regarded as a multiword unit, like the underlined phrases in:

They were very keen participants in the competition.
They were keen as mustard.

However in modern syntactic analysis, the term **adjectival phrase (AdjP)** can also refer to a single adjective. For adjectival phrases in which the adjective takes a clausal *complement*, see **adjective**, section 6.

Modern grammarians emphasize that an **adjectival phrase** is one in which the head is an adjective. It may include an adverb or prepositional complement, as shown below. Within the syntax of the clause, the adjectival phrase may appear

• either before or after a noun (as its pre- or post-modifier), as in:

a large enough space   a space large enough

• following the verb as the complement of its subject:

The space was large enough for an office.

As the examples show, the adjectival head "large" may appear early or later in the adjectival phrase (see further under **head and headedness**, section 2). The adjectival phrase used to premodify a noun is sometimes termed ***attributive***, while the one postmodifying it is ***postpositive***. Those that take the role of subject complement after the verb are termed ***predicative*** (see further under **adjective**, section 5). Of the three types, the attributive use of the adjectival phrase is the least common, since without its own (adverbial) modifiers, the adjective is structurally a premodifier of the noun head. In systemic–functional grammar, the predicative adjective and any modifiers are termed the ***adjectival group*** (Halliday and Matthiessen **2004**). Their term for the attributive adjective is *epithet* (see further under **epithet**).

One special type of **adjectival phrase** consists only of a determiner and adjective, for example those underlined in:

The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
The Portuguese were adventurous sailors.

This construction typically presupposes a group of people as its head noun, and is always construed in the plural though it has no plural marking. The same nounless phrase can occasionally be found used more abstractly, as in:

The ultimate is a holiday on the moon.

Grammarians note that in this case, the adjectival head is construed in the singular. For Huddleston and Pullum (2002), these are examples of the *fused modifier-head* construction as noun phrase. See further under **absolute**, section 1; **noun phrase**, section 1; and **fused head**.

adjective

1 **types of adjective: semantic and morpho-syntactic groupings**
2 **sequences of adjectives**
3 **gradability and degrees of comparison (analytical and synthetic)**
4 **nongradable adjectives**
5 **attributive, predicative, and postpositive adjectives**
6 **complementation of adjectives**
7 **compound adjectives**

1 **Types of adjective**
Words belonging to the **adjective** class are many and varied, and can be grouped in terms of several intersecting parameters. They may express properties or attributes of the noun they qualify, or aspects of the way in which that noun is perceived or evaluated. In terms of this dichotomy they are either *inherent* or *non-inherent*: compare *a desirable car*, where the adjective is non-inherent, with *an old American car* (where both adjectives are inherent). Grammarians refer to these two types in other terms such as *evaluative* or *attitudinal* and *descriptive* or *defining* respectively. The dividing line between the two types is not always clear-cut, however. Systemic–functional grammar sees the two types as *interpersonal* and *experiential* respectively (see further under **metafunction of language**). It also draws a sharper distinction between the "descriptive" (e.g. *large door*) and "defining" (e.g. *iron door*) adjectives, where the first are termed *epithets* and the second *classifiers*. See further in section 2 below.

Within the subclass of inherent adjectives, some grammars (Quirk et al. 1985) distinguish further between the *stative* and the *dynamic*: the first is putatively a stable property of the noun, e.g. *He is a big man*, and the second a more temporary quality, e.g. *She is a tired teacher*, but they are difficult to separate in examples such as *She is a careful person*. Other grammars (Biber et al. 1999; Huddleston and Pullum 2002) identify various subcategories of adjectives, those referring to age, color, shape, size; affect (emotional state); ease/difficulty, and other more or less inherent properties; as well as clearly non-inherent, evaluative subcategories such as importance and worth, and those expressing modal parameters such as certainty, ability, willingness, necessity. These