

○ **P. COLLINS & C. HOLLO, *ENGLISH GRAMMAR: AN INTRODUCTION***

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At the beginning of *English Grammar: An introduction*, the authors present the book to the reader as *an* analysis and note that they generally follow the approach of Huddleston and Pullum (e.g. 2002) but also draw ideas from Quirk and his colleagues (e.g. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1972). This explicit positioning, as a grammatical analysis in contrast to others, is a strength of the text which is aimed at both secondary and tertiary students. Collins and Hollo describe their system while ensuring the reader understands its logic and place amongst others.

The book consists of two main parts: Part A (chapters 1–8), *A grammatical description*, and Part B (chapters 9–11), *Looking at language in its context*. Chapters 3–11 are organised so that they explore incrementally larger units of linguistic analysis, moving from parts of speech and phrases to clauses to sentences, and finally, in Part B, to whole texts. In addition, there is a short glossary and an appendix containing eleven texts. The texts, which include poems, advertisements, newspaper articles and recipes, are the source of many of the example sentences. Further to this, they are used for text-based analyses in the main text and by the reader in exercises. The reader thus becomes familiar with the texts through revisiting them focussing on different phenomena.

Chapter 1 introduces the approach to grammar taken in the volume. It argues for the importance of form rather than meaning in defining grammatical categories and evidences the shortcomings of traditional approaches which rely on prototypical members for description. The authors provide tests and rules of thumb to identify forms, enabling students new to grammatical analysis to test their understanding and providing them with a set of tools for checking future analyses.

Chapter 1 also includes a well-handled (unlikely to offend) explicit discussion of prescriptive approaches and how they contrast with the descriptive approach of linguists. I was pleased to see that right at the beginning sociolinguistic issues such as context, register and variation are discussed, with section 1.9 devoted to ‘language variety’. There is even a brief discussion of standard language as an ideological construction and the inequality it creates. While this is an excellent and innovative beginning, chapter 1 contains a great deal of information and could overwhelm a reader new to such ideas, particularly in that it discusses details at the phrase level and macro sociolinguistic issues.

Chapter 2 provides an initial overview of the contents of Part A. It contains more information regarding syntactic, morphological and semantic properties of parts of speech belonging to the open classes (open to new additions) and closed ones. The major categories of the forthcoming chapters are briefly introduced with clear forward-referencing for further discussion. This allows the whole picture to be clear from the beginning before details are discussed further, which I believe would be helpful to most readers.

Chapter 3, like all the chapters following it in Part A, details a grammatical description focussed on particular elements, here nouns and noun phrases. Chapter 4 provides a clear discussion of verbs and verb phrases. Chapter 5 describes adjectives, adverbs and prepositions and their respective phrases. The authors note the artificiality and tension inherent in separating out closely connected elements but emphasise the clarity it provides. These chapters contain plenty of examples with some from the texts in the appendix, providing a sense of ‘genuine’ data rather than just neatly constructed examples to illustrate a particular point.

In chapter 6, clause structure and clause types are thoroughly examined. Complementation, mood and negation are covered, and there is ‘a text-based demonstration’ of the effects of modality and clause type in a John Donne poem from the appendix. Again this exemplification grounds the theory in something demonstrably useful as the chapters gradually build towards text analysis engaging with a wide-range of features.

Chapter 7 discusses different kinds of subordination and coordination before comparing alternative ways of showing these in bracketing, full trees or ‘flattened’ trees, which emphasise the structure of sentences without providing the full details. The authors argue that the representation needs to fit the task and show the merits of each.

Chapter 8 concludes Part A of the book by examining information structure. In Part A, I particularly like the tendency to discuss examples which are not prototypical rather than only showing the clearest examples present in many treatments of grammar. It does not therefore overgeneralise or simplify, but assumes a capable reader.

Part B, *Looking at language in context*, moves to the level of text analysis. Chapter 9 begins with a discussion of the ‘minor sentence’ which the authors note is often overlooked in grammar books. The introduction states the importance of such forms in everyday communication. It continues the commitment to exploring grammar in speech and diverse written genres rather than at a more abstract level. These earlier parts of the chapter are then used to study cohesion, bringing a reflexivity which encourages metalinguistic awareness. Chapter 10 builds on this discussion with an exploration of register and genre.

Chapter 11 brings together the elements of the book in example analyses and a checklist of features for use in future analyses. This final chapter nicely concludes the volume,

demonstrating the skills readers should now possess, the tasks they should be able to undertake and how the book can act as a reference in such endeavours.

The main content of the book is supplemented with text boxes, which provide interesting examples, and asides that are often more ‘applied’. Unlike in many textbooks, the boxes are not so frequent as to disrupt the flow of argumentation or irritate the reader. Moreover, nearly every time I felt an alternative point could be made or something important was omitted, it was noted shortly after in a text box. The only exceptions to this related to mentioning variation.

There are references to regional variation in the book, usually presented in the text boxes, but they refer to just American English, British English and Australian English (and without mention of variation within these, beyond *non-standard grammar*). While this is progressive compared to many volumes on English, on occasion I would have liked more comment. For example, in the discussion of mass versus count nouns, the acceptability of *accommodations* in American English is noted but there is no mention of how variable this division is in new(er) varieties. However, perhaps discussing a wide-range of varieties is asking too much for an introductory grammar text.

In general, the exercises at the end of each chapter work well and test understanding of the main points. The exercises would be helpful for either individual readers working through the text on their own or for use in a course. However, this is less the case for the exercises in Part B, which are more like small projects and much more time-consuming. The authors suggest that most of the Part B exercises should be completed in a group. Furthermore, they do not supply answers or points of discussion (this is also the case for many of the more open questions presented in Part A). There are quite a few errors in the production of the answers but all those I found appear inconsequential (i.e. the word is incorrectly reproduced not the label). More problematic for its use as a textbook are the errors in the index, with many page references incorrect by 10 or more pages.

On many occasions I find reading introductory textbooks a frustrating experience as there are omissions and over-simplifications which so easily give rise to misinterpretation. The greatest strength of this book is that it avoids this. It is clear, engaging and concise without sacrificing content or patronising the reader. Overall, the structure of the book demonstrates great consideration of it as an educational text and it is enjoyable to read. Throughout, the reader understands why something is being explained and what will come next. I believe it would work for both secondary and tertiary students as the authors intended. Collins and Hollo manage to give a lot of detailed information in a quite slim and very approachable volume. It contains small references, especially in Part B, to a wide-range of linguistic perspectives, touching on, for example, politeness theory and conversation analysis but not in a way that is highlighted or intrusive. It simply demonstrates the authors’ connection of grammar to context and use.

REFERENCES

- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1972). *A grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.