

TEXTOS DOCENTS

143

GRAMÀTICA DESCRIPTIVA DE L'ANGLÈS I

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Departament de Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya



UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA



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Descriptive Grammar of English I

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UNIT 1: SCHOOLS OF LINGUISTICS

INPUT 1

1. STRUCTURALISM. An approach to linguistics that analyses and describes the structure of language, as distinguished from its comparative and historical aspects.
2. FUNCTIONALISM. 1. The theory of design that the form of a thing should be determined by its use. 2. Any doctrine that stresses utility or purpose. 3. A system of thought based on the premise that all mental processes derive from their usefulness to the organism in adapting to the environment.
3. GENERATIVE GRAMMAR. A description of a language in terms of explicit rules that ideally generate all and only the grammatical sentences of the language. Compare transformational grammar.
TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR. A grammatical description of a language making essential use of transformational rules. Such grammars are usually but not necessarily generative grammars.

Collins Electronic English Dictionary & Thesaurus for Windows

TRANSFORMATIONAL-GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

Language is a uniquely human characteristic. Each person has programmed into his genes a faculty called universal grammar.

(Noam Chomsky, b. 1928)

Transformational-generative grammar, linguistic theory associated with Noam CHOMSKY, particularly with his *Syntactic Structures* (1957), and with Chomsky's teacher Zellig Harris. Generative grammar attempts to define rules that can generate the infinite number of grammatical (well-formed) sentences possible in a language.

It starts not from a behaviorist analysis of minimal sounds but from a rationalist assumption that a deep structure underlies a language, and that a similar deep structure underlies all languages. Transformational grammar seeks to identify rules (transformations) that govern relations between parts of a sentence, on the assumption that beneath such aspects as word order a fundamental structure exists. Transformational and generative grammar together have been the starting point for a tremendous growth in Linguistics studies since the 1950s.

Microsoft Bookshelf 1992 The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia. Columbia University Press.

In the mid-20th century the American linguist Noam Chomsky proposed that linguistics should go beyond describing the structure of languages; it should provide an explanation of how

sentences in any language are interpreted and understood. The process, he believed, could be accounted for by a universal human grammar (that is, a model or theory of linguistic knowledge or competence). Linguistic competence refers to the innate, often unconscious, knowledge that allows people to produce and understand sentences, many of which they have never heard before. A system of language analysis that makes it possible to generate all the grammatically acceptable sentences of a language and eliminate ungrammatical constructions is called a generative grammar.

According to Chomsky, there are rules of universal grammar and other rules for particular languages. In specific languages, both universal and particular rules are utilized. These rules allow for sentence elements to be arranged in different ways (for example, "Mary hit the ball," and "The ball was hit by Mary"). A grammar that takes basic, underlying semantic units and transforms them to produce sentences with recognizable and understandable order and units is called a transformational grammar. A transformational-generative grammar is, therefore, a grammar that generates all the acceptable sentences of a language and uses rules, called transformations, to transform, or change, the underlying elements into what a person actually says.

ACTIVITY 1

Write a list of the ideas presented in both texts with which you were not familiar and then compare your notes to those of other students.

ACTIVITY 2

Choose one of the texts above and summarize it in a maximum of 5 lines. Discuss your summaries in class.

INPUT 2

CHOMSKY'S UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR

ACTIVITY 3

We have selected different introductions to Chomsky's Universal Grammar from various sources. Fill in the blanks with the words from the list below the text.

COOK (1982)

The central (1) ----- of Chomsky's theory of language is Universal Grammar (UG), "the (2) ----- of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages... the essence of human's language". All humans (3) ----- share part of their knowledge of language regardless of which (4) ----- they speak. UG is their common inheritance.

UG is a theory of knowledge, not of behavior; its concern is with the internal structure of the human mind. The nature of this knowledge is inseparable from the problem of how it is acquired; a proposal for language knowledge necessitates an explanation of how it came into being. UG theory holds that the (5) ----- knows a set of principles that apply to all languages, and parameters that (6) ----- within clearly defined limits from one language to another. Acquiring language means (7) ----- how these principles apply to a particular language and which value is appropriate for each parameter.

Each principle of language that is proposed is a substantive claim about the (8) ----- of the speaker and the nature of (9) ----- . UG is not making vague or unsubstantiable suggestions about properties of the mind but precise statements based on specific evidence. The general concepts of the theory are inextricably connected with the specific details; the importance of UG is its attempt to integrate (10) ----- , mind and acquisition at every moment.

Learning, concept, language, system, speaker, vary, mind, grammar, acquisition, beings.

McLAUGHLIN (1987)

Following McLaughlin, the Chomskyan (1) ----- grammar approach assumes that the first-language learner comes to acquisition task with (2) ----- , specifically linguistic, knowledge, or Universal Grammar. The claim is that certain principles of the human mind are, to a degree, (3) ----- determined and specialized for language learning. These abstract and linguistically significant (4) ----- underlie all natural languages and comprise the essential faculty for language with which all individuals are in general uniformly and equally endowed.

The Chomskyan position views Universal Grammar as part of the brain. Consequently, 'learning' is not the correct term to describe how language develops. Because Chomskyan theory is concerned with grammatical competence, that is the speaker's knowledge of the language, 'acquisition' refers to ideal language learning unaffected by (5) ----- , processing limitations, memory restrictions, and other cognitive and motivational (6) ----- .

It is generally assumed in UG theory that the child starts with all the principles of UG (7) ----- and that all human languages conform of these principles. What one sees in all human languages is the interaction of the workings of the language faculty with other mental organs. Note, however, that this study of developmental sequences sheds little light on what Chomsky means by 'acquisition'. His concern was with the operation of the language faculty rather than with development.

UG provides the only way of accounting for how children are able to acquire their native language. If one assumes that (8) ----- form hypotheses about their

language that they test in practice, the question of how they reject (9) ----- hypotheses needs to be answered. Chomsky and his followers argue that the child does not get enough negative evidence to reject incorrect hypotheses. Nor do children produce enough incorrect sentences to test out hypotheses adequately.

According to Universal Grammar theory, the principles of UG involve a set of properties with certain parameters. These parameters remain 'open' until they are set by experience with the environment. For Chomsky, language acquisition is not so much a problem of acquiring grammatical rules, but rather a (10) ----- whereby the learner sets the values of the parameters of the principles of UG. The grammar of a language is the set of values it assigns to various parameters.

Generative, biologically, children, innate, maturation, factors, available, process, incorrect, principles.

HARMER (1983)

If you ask the average Englishman about his knowledge of grammar he will say he doesn't know any. What is meant by this, of course, is that he cannot tell you what the rules of grammar are, or how English works grammatically. The same man, however, can say a sentence like 'If I had known, I'd have come earlier'. How is this possible?

Linguists have been investigating a native speaker's knowledge for many years, and perhaps the most famous work in the respect is that of Noam Chomsky. His suggestion is that a native speaker has somewhere in his brain a set of grammar rules which he can use to make sentences with.

We will look at his representation of the rule governing a simple English sentence: "The book kicked the dog", Chomsky might represent the sentence in the following way. The rule says that the sentence (S) contains a noun phrase (NP) and a verb phrase (VP). The noun phrase contains a determiner (D) and a noun (N) and the verb phrase contains a verb (V) and another noun phrase, which we already know, contains a determiner and a noun.

The realisation of this rule is not important for our purposes, but what is interesting is that we slot bits of vocabulary into this tree, or frame. By changing the bits of vocabulary we get completely different sentences, for example, "The girl loved the man", "The American ate the hamburger", "The artist painted the landscape", etc. In other words, the rule has not changed, but the sentence has. By using the rule as a base we can select the vocabulary to mean the things we want.

Chomsky's contention is that there are a finite number of such rules that all native speakers know: a native speaker knows all the rules. With these rules it is possible to create an infinite number of sentences. In our lifetime we will never say all the possible sentences in our language. And yet we all unconsciously know the rules of our language otherwise we would hardly be able to say anything at all. Chomsky made a difference between this knowledge and the sentences it produced. He calls the grammatical knowledge competence, and the realisation of these rules as sentences, performance.

Although the type of rules explained by Chomsky may account for a native

speaker's knowledge of grammar, it may not be sufficient to explain everything a native speaker knows about his/her own language. One researcher in particular thought that Chomsky had missed out some very important information. Dell Hymes wrote "there are rules of use without which the rules of syntax are meaningless. In other words, the competence that Chomsky talked about (a knowledge of grammar rules) was no good to a native speaker if he did not know how to use the language those rules produced. Hymes said that competence by itself was not enough to explain a native speaker's knowledge of the language and he replaced it with his own concept of 'communicative competence'".

WHITE (1989)

White presents the potential relationships between linguistic theory and second language acquisition. Following Chomsky she asks three questions:

- a) What constitutes knowledge of language?
- b) How is such knowledge acquired?
- c) How is such knowledge put to use?

Knowledge of language is technically known as linguistic competence. It is an abstract system of principles and rules that produce the grammatical sentences of a language. Principles and rules account for such formal properties of language as syntax, phonology, morphology, and certain aspects of semantics.

The knowledge that is represented in this way is unconscious knowledge; most people are not aware of the systematic nature of their language and cannot state the rules and principles that they in fact follow.

The linguistic competence or knowledge of the language is very rich: as well as being able to understand and produce utterances which we have never heard before, we know that certain utterances are grammatical, others ungrammatical, that some sentences have more than one meaning, that some meanings can be represented by more than one sentence. None of this knowledge appears to be taught.

The grammar representing one's unconscious linguistic knowledge is a mental construct and it underlies language use. Linguists working within this framework disagree about the precise form that a grammar should take but they agree that what they are trying to discover is the way in which language is mentally represented.

Chomsky argues that the acquisition of grammar is only possible if it is guided by some kind of innate structure, specifically linguistic in nature, usually called Universal Grammar (UG). In other words, not all the knowledge of language in fact has to be acquired, because some of it is already 'built-in'. A central goal of linguistic theory is to come up with a characterization of UG, of the principles that shape our linguistic knowledge.

LONG (1991)

Long describes Chomsky's Universal Grammar in terms of a Nativist theory, that is one of those which purport to explain by positing an innate biological endowment that makes learning possible. Chomsky notes various factors which he claims support the idea that humans are innately (i.e. genetically) endowed with

universal language-specific knowledge, that is, what Chomsky calls Universal Grammar. The main argument, often referred to as 'logical problem' of language acquisition is that without such endowment language learning would be impossible because the input data are insufficiently 'rich' to allow acquisition ever to occur.

According to the Chomskyan view, the input is deficient, or 'poor' in two ways. First, it is claimed to be 'degenerate' in the sense that is marred by performance features, such as false starts, slips, fragments and ungrammaticality resulting from these and other pressure inherent in real-time oral communication, and is therefore inadequate data base for language learning. Second, and more serious, however, the input is 'degenerate' in the sense that it is inadequate in various ways. Thus it does not usually contain 'negative evidence' information from which the learner could work out what is not possible in a given language.

Chomsky's explanation of language acquisition involves at least three questionable assumptions. The first is that learning occurs quickly and is mostly complete by the age of five. In fact, a good deal of complex syntax is not mastered until much later. A second crucial assumption is that certain syntactic principles are unlearnable, and therefore innate. This is increasingly being challenged. A third assumption is that input available to learners is inadequate, specifically that it lacks essential negative evidence with which to remedy excessive complexity and overgeneralizations. While obviously true as far as the absence of negative input is concerned, this need not imply innate linguistic knowledge. Rather, learning may be a process involving initial adoption of conservative hypotheses, followed by movement along a developmental continuum, governed by a learning theory and guided by positive evidence.

INPUT 3

GRAMMAR BOOKS

CONTENTS	OBJECTIVES
1. Bibliography of Grammar of English 2. Main grammarians. 3. Main approaches to Grammar. 4. Classifying grammar books. 5. Analysing and evaluating bibliography. 6. Contributing to update the bibliography. 7. Taking responsibility for your own learning.	1. Get familiar with the most salient grammarians and grammar books of English. 2. Examine and evaluate the differences among grammar books. 3. Collaborate and contribute to the class work updating the bibliography.

ACTIVITY 4

Classifying the grammar books used in EFL classes. You have studied English for some years. You may have just finished 'Llengua Anglesa I'. In all those courses, no matter how communicative or traditional they were, grammar had a role. Have a look at the list of books below and decide which ones you have used, come across, know something about. Afterwards you will be asked to classify them. Answer the following questions and discuss them with your partner or in small groups of four.

	STD1	STD2	STD3	STD4
1. How long have you studied English for?				
2. How important was English Grammar in the courses you have taken?				
3. Do you like studying English Grammar?				
4. Do you like doing English grammar exercises?				
5. How important was grammar in the 'Selectivitat' exam?				
6. How important was grammar in the 'Batxillerat' English classes?				
7. Have you ever used a grammar book as a coursebook?				
8. Did you use to consult English grammar books?				
9. Can you say a few differences among the grammar books you have used?				
10. Grammar books I have used, heard of, come across. List them				

ACTIVITY 5

Make a list with the most popular grammar books used by your classmates.

THE MOST POPULAR GRAMMAR BOOKS AMONG STUDENTS	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
COMMENTS:	

ACTIVITY 6

Have a look at the list of books below and then find out ways in which the grammar books can be grouped.

LIST OF GRAMMAR BOOKS COMMONLY USED IN EFL/ESL CLASSES
--

Alexander, L. G. (1993) *Longman Advanced Grammar. Reference and Practice*. London: Longman.
 Alexander, L. G. (1992) *Longman English Grammar*. London: Longman.
 Allsop, J. (1990) *Making Sense of English Grammar*. London: Cassell.

Bowers, R. G. & Bamber, B. (1987) *Talking about Grammar*. London: Longman.

Collins Cobuild (1990) *English Grammar. Helping Learners with Real English*. Collins Birmingham University International Language Database. London: HarperCollins.

Collins Cobuild (1991) *Student's Grammar. Reference and Practice through Real English. Classroom edition*. Collins Birmingham University International Language Database. London: HarperCollins.

Collins Cobuild (1991) *Student's Grammar. Reference and Practice through Real English. Self-Study with answer key*. Collins Birmingham University International Language Database. London: HarperCollins.

Collins Cobuild (1991) *English Grammar Exercises*. Collins Birmingham University International Language Database. London: HarperCollins.

Collins Cobuild (1992) *English Usage. Helping Learners with Real English*. Collins Birmingham University International Language Database. London: HarperCollins.

Collins Cobuild (1994) *Cobuild Student's Dictionary and Grammar*. Collins Birmingham University International Language Database. London: HarperCollins.

Courtney (1988) *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*. London: Longman.

Cowie, A. P. & Mackin, R. (1978) *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fowler, W.S. & Coe, N. (1983) *Practice Your English 1/2/3 Advanced*. Edinburgh: Nelson.

Fowler, W.S. & Coe, N. (1983) *Test your English 1/2/3 Advanced*. Edinburgh: Nelson.

García Arranz, A. (1986) *Manual de Gramática Inglesa Comparada*. Madrid: Edi-6.

Graver, B. D. (1986) *Advanced English Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kayfe, J. L. & Smith, M. E. F. (1992) *Speaking Effectively*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Knepler, M. (1990) *Grammar with a Purpose: A Contextualized Approach*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan.

Larrea, P., Riviere, C. & Asselineau, R. (1992) *Gramática del estudiante inglés. Idiomas hoy*. Barcelona: Editorial Difusión. Centro de Investigación y Publicaciones de Idiomas, 1994.

Leech, G. (1989) *An A-Z of English Grammar & Usage*. London: Edward Arnold.

Longman Language Activator (1993). Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Lyons (1986) *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McArthur, T. (1984) *The Written Word. Book 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McEwan, N. (1984) *Preparing for Examinations in English Literature*. London: Longman.

Merino, J. (1990) *El Inglés comprendido*. Madrid: Autodidáctica.

Murphy, R (1985) *English Grammar in Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sánchez Benedito, F. (1990) *Gramática Inglesa (Ejercicios)*. London: Longman..

Sánchez Benedito, F., Dawson, A. S. & Lavín, E. (1992) *English Grammar for Spanish Speakers*. London: Longman.

Sánchez Benedito, F. & Dawson, A.(1993) *Ponte al día en inglés. Gramática 1/2/3/4/5*. Madrid: Alhambra Longman.

Sánchez Benedito, F. & Dawson, A.(1993) *Ponte al día en inglés. Preposiciones / Modismos/Verbos frasales/Vocabulario*. Madrid: Alhambra Longman.

Schramper Azar, B. (1984) *Understanding and Using English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith , M & Smith, G (1990) *A Study Skills Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stanley (ed.) (1992) *English grammar 1/2/3/4 for the 'Escuela Oficial de Idiomas*. Irún: Editorial Stanley.

Swan, M. (1984) *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomson & Martinet (1986) *Oxford Pocket English Grammar Essential for Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomson & Martinet (1986) *A Practical English Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomson & Martinet (1986) *A Practical English Grammar. Exercises 1 and 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomson and Martinet (1986) *A Practical English Grammar. Structure Drills 1 and 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Turell, M. (1988) *No one-to one in Grammar*. Barcelona: Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona.

Wellman, G. (1989) *Wordbuilder* Oxford: Heinemann.

Criteria used:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

INPUT 4

PRESCRIPTIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMARS

Grammars are divided into prescriptive grammars and descriptive grammars. Below you will find a definition of each type of grammar. Choose the right option.

	PRESCRIPTIVE / DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMARS (1)	PRESCRIPTIVE / DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMARS (2)
Definition	PRESCRIPTIVE / DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMARS are concerned with establishing norms of correct and incorrect usage and formulating rules based on these norms to be followed by users of the language.	PRESCRIPTIVE / DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMARS are concerned with reporting the usage of native speakers without reference to proposed norms of correctness or advocacy of rules based on such norms.

What are prescriptive and descriptive grammars?	Children rarely analyse their language in any formal way, at least not before they are coaxed to do so by language-conscious parents and instructors. In schools teachers go about polishing children's language skills -mainly reading and writing- and admonish them almost constantly to monitor their language and to use it 'properly'. This level of language analysis is known as PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR/ DESCRIPTIVE; when working from textbooks in prescriptive grammar, children are expected to impose conscious rules of language usage on the unanalysed language they already speak fluently.
By Richard Teschner & Eston Evans (93)	PRESCRIPTIVE / DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR presents the facts about a language as it is actually spoken in a systematic, non-judgemental fashion. Analysing grammar in this fashion requires us to consider all utterances in English by any native speaker of English to be grammatical, i.e. well-formed. In doing so, we must ignore for the moment the fact that all native speakers of all ages make occasional performance errors or slips of the tongue in such all areas as word choice, structure or pronunciation; these performance errors are caused by such inadvertent factors as haste, tension, fatigue inattention or by deliberate attempts to use the language in a humorous or ironic way. (Source: Teschner, Richard V. & Eston Evans. (1993) <i>Analysing the Grammar of English. A Brief Undergraduate Textbook</i>. Georgetown University Press. Washington, D.C.)

		PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR	DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR
Features	Age	Children to adults	Adult learners
	Proficiency	Beginners to advanced speakers of the target language	Advanced speakers, native and native-like speakers of the target language
	Users	SL and FL learners and SL and FL teachers.	Native speakers and native-like speakers and Linguists and University Teachers.
	Places	Primary, Secondary , High School and Language Academies.	Colleges and Universities. Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Faculties.
	Aim	To learn or improve the language	To learn about the language

ACTIVITY 7

Sometimes it is difficult to establish the extent to which a grammar book should be regarded as a prescriptive or as a descriptive grammar. Below you will find a continuum line that goes from prescriptive grammars to descriptive grammars. Read the information from each of the grammar books listed and place them in the continuum line. Then put them in order.

PRESCR. _____ DESCR.

- Alexander, L.G. (1994) *Longman English Grammar*. Longman.
Contents: 1. Analysing English 2. Verbs and Tenses; Forms and Functions. 3. Basic Structures, Questions, Do Support, Negation, Auxiliaries, Responses, Emphasis Contraction. 4. Modals. Prepositional and Participle Verbs. Transitivity and Voice. Conditionality. 5. Components of the Noun Phrase: Forms and Functions. 6. Adjectives and Relative Clauses. 7. Adverbs. It and There. Referentials and Non-Referentials. Clefts. 8. Embedded Sentences: Coordination and Subordination.
- Huddleston, Rodney. (1993 6th , 1984 1st) *Introduction to the Grammar of English*. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. Cambridge University Press.

This book is written primarily for students of linguistics in universities and other tertiary institutions. It assumes no previous knowledge of linguistics; the first three chapters introduce the theoretical concepts and methodological principles needed to follow the later descriptive chapters. I have likewise made minimal assumptions about the reader's familiarity with 'traditional grammar' -all terms borrowed from the traditional repertoire, such as 'noun', 'transitive verb', 'relative clause' and so on, are fully explained. Although the book covers a fair amount of the grammar, it is not simply a short grammar of English, inasmuch as it devotes a good deal of attention to the problem of justifying the analysis proposed (where, for example, it differs from the traditional analysis) or of choosing between alternative

analyses- it is in this sense that it is directed towards the student of linguistics.

Contents: 1. Basic Concepts in grammar. 2. The structural approach to linguistics analysis. 3. The parts of speech. 4. Verbs and verb phrases. 5. The structure of kernel structures. 6. Nouns and Noun phrases. 7. Pronouns. 8. Adjectives and adjective phrases. 9. Verbs, nouns and adjectives: the boundaries between them. 10. Adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions. 11. Clause type. 12. Coordination and subordination. 13. Negation. 14. Thematic systems of the clause.

3. Hurford, James R. (1994). *Grammar, A Student's guide*. Cambridge University Press.

This book is for people who want to know, or need to revise, the meaning of words like adverb, clause, conjunction, passive, subject, and so on. (...) This terminology is useful whether you are just studying one or two languages, say French and German (or even English!), or whether you are interested in human languages in a more general, far-reaching way, in which case you may be drawn into linguistics. This book provides explanations of the basic vocabulary it is useful to know before starting to study any language, or before starting to study the theory of them all, that is, linguistics.

This book is intended to be useful to: College (and perhaps high school) students of languages who find clear statements about grammar helpful to their language-learning efforts; students of English making systematic studies of texts and language in use; English and foreign-language teachers and beginning students of linguistics.

Contents: This book is organised alphabetically like a dictionary, for quick access to any term, with no assumption that the reader will have read any other entries first. Alphabetical entries. With Exercises.

4. Teschner, Richard V. & Eston Evans(1993). *Analysing the Grammar of English. A Brief Undergraduate Textbook*. Georgetown University Press.

Though not intended primarily as a pedagogical grammar, *Analysing the Grammar of English: A Brief Undergraduate Textbook* has been used successfully with advanced ESOL students as a combination review grammar and first course in the analysis of English as a grammatical system. Age: BUT's main target populations are persons majoring in linguistics disciplines (such as Education and its subfields) for whom a course in English grammatical analysis forms part of the curriculum.