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seriously affect my view of it as an excellent introductory work, lucid, amusing and informative. In the second edition Matthews will no doubt remodel the last chapter and so eliminate most of the book's weaknesses. But even in its present state it will rescue freshmen linguists who have too often been (in Milton's words) 'tossed and turmoiled with their unballasted wits in fathomless and unquiet deeps of controversy'.

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(Received 7 January 1975)

Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik, *A grammar of contemporary English.* London: Longman, 1972. Pp. xii+1,120.

The dust jacket proclaims that '*A grammar of contemporary English* is the fullest and most comprehensive synchronic description of English ever written'. If 'synchronic' is construed so as to rule out Jespersen's *Modern English grammar on historical principles*, then one can hardly quarrel with the superlatives. If the first chapter, an introductory essay on 'The English language' is excluded, the grammar includes 13 chapters and 3 appendices, divided into 1,204 sections covering almost exactly 1,000 pages (discounting the pages devoted to the table of contents for each chapter and appendix). Ch. 2 presents an outline of the structure of English sentences in such a way as to motivate the organization of the rest of the book. It is followed by chapters dealing with the verb phrase (the verb and its auxiliaries), the basic noun phrase, adjectives and adverbs, and prepositions and preposition phrases. Ch. 7 provides a detailed examination of simple sentences; this is followed by chapters on adverbial phrases, co-ordination and apposition, sentence connexion, complex sentences, predicate structures, and complex noun phrases. Ch. 14 is called 'Focus, theme, and emphasis', and deals with variations in sentence structure as they relate to the presentation of information. The three appendices deal with word formation, prosody, and punctuation.

Thus, the book has a kind of cyclical organization, with the structure (and, ultimately, function) of sentences as the recurring theme. It is an excellently laid out book, fine for both browsing and for examining specific topics. The 28-page index and the 17 tables of contents make looking things up almost pleasurable.

The book espouses no particular theory, for which the authors provide justification by remarking, 'None, however, seems yet adequate to account for all linguistic phenomena' (vi), and no detailed discussion of theoretical issues is provided. The authors, however, acknowledge their indebtedness both to the scholarly tradition of grammar writing, and to the insights of several contemporary schools of linguistic theory, notably those of the transformational-generativists. The book is a lot more like a contemporary linguistic work than like the compendious grammars of the past, by virtue of its having adopted many of the styles and techniques of current linguistics, such as the use of numbered examples (almost entirely made up rather than cited from literature), critical use of ungrammatical sentences, the pointing out of linguistic generalizations, and the presentation of detailed arguments in defence of many of their structural claims (a typical example occurs on p. 64, in which the authors give a systematic argument showing why sentences like *He expected not to see the play* are not counterexamples to their claim that when a verb is negated, *do* is introduced).

Moreover, despite the authors' disclaimers, the book is far from devoid of linguistic theorizing. They speak freely of 'transformational relations' among sentences, by which they appear to have in mind the kind of relations in Harris' theory of transformations. However, in deciding whether sentences are to be related transformationally, they sometimes apply criteria that are irrelevant to Harris' notion. Thus they argue that a sentence like *He's eating* is not to be transformationally related to any transitive sentence like *He's eating something*, but rather that the former contains a verb morphologically derived from the verb of the latter. The reason they give is that the process, if transformational, should apply generally to transitive verbs, which it does not. However, if this criterion is applied systematically, it would also rule out relations such as that between *She sent him a book* and *She sent a book to him*, which the authors do consider transformational. This, then, is the extent of the theorizing to be found in this book: up to the point at which results are obtained that confirm the authors' (apparently) intuitive feel for the language and its grammar, and no further. Now, the results of careful theorizing (that does not have a particular result in mind in advance) may well yield the kind of analysis that the authors happen to believe in. But it should be made clear that a great deal of the analysis presented in this book has no solid basis in theory. To illustrate, I select one of their analyses that fails to stand up under close theoretical scrutiny (many more could be given, but their enumeration here would be impractical).

In sections 2.21–2.23 (53–56), the authors discuss the interaction of negation and question; specifically they attempt to explain the affinity between negative

statements and questions and the special character of negative questions. These are difficult problems that have puzzled linguists for a long time and it is to the authors' credit that they tackle them so directly. What they say is that a positive declarative sentence is an assertion, and that negative sentences and questions are non-assertions. From this they conclude that negative sentences and questions should behave alike, and that negative questions should have a special status (the authors go on to claim in section 7.65 (397), that negative *wh*-questions, except for *why*-questions, are unacceptable). But this explanation cannot possibly be correct, since of course there are many other sentence types besides questions and negative sentences that are non-assertions, for example imperatives; yet there is no special affinity between questions and negative sentences on the one hand and imperatives on the other. Moreover, consider conditional clauses. They, too, are non-assertive, and they do show the same affinity to negative sentences as do questions. But negation in conditional clauses is interpreted exactly as in declarative sentences.

In addition, the claim that negative *wh*-questions (other than *why*-questions) are unacceptable is preposterous. I cannot imagine anyone rejecting *What doesn't he eat?* or *Where haven't we been before?* Such questions are perfectly normal English sentences, and moreover are semantically distinct from their positive counterparts. For the interpretation of negation in questions in general a reasonable explanation follows from the semantic analysis given by Katz & Postal (1964), in which it is observed that a question is interpreted as a request for which of two propositions is true: the declarative counterpart to the question or the negation of that counterpart. From this it follows that positive and negative questions are synonymous. The special conditions on the use of negative questions are just that; use conditions that do not bear on the meaning proper of those questions. *Wh*-questions, on the other hand, are not interpreted as disjunctions of the same sort, and hence negative *wh*-questions are related to positive *wh*-questions semantically just as negative statements are related to positive statements.

The authors' work, in my judgment, is also flawed by their failure to distinguish clearly between acceptability and grammaticality. The terms 'unacceptable' and 'ungrammatical' are used interchangeably throughout, and there is one passage that clearly reflects their belief that there is no distinction. It concerns the effect of self-embedding in reducing comprehensibility, and they write:

> It is important to note, therefore, that the factors we have been considering [self-embedding vs. right-branching] do not just concern good and bad style, but also the more basic question of what is a possible English sentence (794).

But as has been repeatedly argued and demonstrated, self-embedding *per se* has no bearing whatever on the question of what is a possible English sentence. The claims that it has represents a fundamental confusion about the respective rôles

of grammar and the systems of language use in determining what is likely to be accepted by native speakers under the various conditions in which language is used.

It should, however, be remarked that errors at the level of observational adequacy, aside from the misclassification of certain sentences as grammatical or ungrammatical, are very rare. (One that I picked up is the classification of sentences like *It seemed that the boy was late* as cleft-sentences (68).)

Finally, the matter of coverage must be considered. Despite its length, *A grammar of contemporary English* is not really comprehensive. The list of topics that are not discussed, or that are inadequately discussed, is much too lengthy for presentation here (for example, there is no systematic discussion of reciprocal pronouns). It would, however, be ungracious to dwell on this point. The authors have constructed a truly compendious grammar of English that will forever be useful and stimulating to students and teachers of English and linguistics alike. They are to be warmly congratulated for their achievement.

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Robert A. Hall, jr., *External history of the Romance languages*. New York: American Elsevier, 1974. Pp. xiii+344.

The present volume is the first of a set of six, intended to provide 'a systematic description of the development of the Romance languages (mediaeval and modern) out of their common ancestor Proto-Romance and, farther back in time, out of the common ancestor of Proto-Romance and Classical Latin' (xi). However, inasmuch as the other five volumes promised us are to deal with the internal history of the Romance languages, the first volume can legitimately be evaluated in its own right. The work contains an introduction, summarizing briefly the author's views on language in general and on the theoretical approach appropriate to historical – and, of course, in particular to Romance – linguistics. Then, after an extremely detailed analysis of the present-day position of the Romance languages – including not only the dialects, but also pidgins and creoles – the main body of the work is devoted to a chronological survey of the development