Of Course You Can

an English Language Course for Teachers

Desmond McGarrighan
Kåre Per Nitter Rugesæter



FAGBOKFORLAGET

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Enquiries about this text can be directed to:
Fagbokforlaget
Kanalveien 51
5068 Bergen
Tel.: 55 38 88 00
Fax: 55 38 88 01
email: fagbokforlaget@fagbokforlaget.no
www.fagbokforlaget.no

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Introduction

Learning a language is a never-ending story. This is because languages are living, complex structures – it is tempting to say "organisms" – which develop and change, even to some extent in the course of just a few decades. For example, fifty years ago, a mouse was just a small rodent that people preferred to avoid having much contact with. Then, for a few years, it was also something that many found it impossible to live without, assuming they used a computer, of course. Today, thanks to technological innovation, the hand-held mouse has largely been replaced by the word "touchpad", at least in relation to laptops (another recently coined term). It will be interesting to see how long the words touchpad and laptop live before new technology renders them obsolete and they are replaced by some as yet unknown newcomers.

If you think about it, most people will even keep on learning something new about their mother tongue for as long as they live. It might be words and expressions that they didn't know or understand before, or perhaps the origin of words and expressions that they are familiar with and use on a regular basis.

Doctors, electricians and plumbers – to mention just a few random examples – must keep abreast of developments in their field of expertise. The same goes for teachers, of course. For teachers of English, this means, among other things, constantly enhancing their own language skills and thinking about what to teach their pupils, and how best to teach it.

We the authors have many years' experience in teacher training, and the last couple of years of teaching KFK (Kompetanse for kvalitet) have convinced us of the need for an approach which better accommodates the classroom experience and requirements of the teachers who take these courses.

In this book we present the basic grammar and phonetics of English in a user-friendly, clearly structured fashion. In addition, we suggest ways in which items can be taught in the classroom, as well as tests for the readers and for their pupils. In most chapters there is an "Expert's Corner", where we go a little deeper into selected topics.

As teachers and learners of English ourselves, we hope that we have managed to impart some of the fascination for the language that inspires and motivates us, and that you will find the book interesting and useful, whatever your background and ambitions may be.

Contents

PART ONE / Grammar

What is Grammar? 13

1 Words and Phrases 15
Words 15
Word Classes 16
Phrases 18
Using a Dictionary 21

2 Nouns 25
Countable Nouns 25
Compound Nouns 27
Uncountable Nouns 28
Other Special Cases 28
Collective Nouns 29

3 Determiners 33
The Articles 33
Demonstrative Determiners 36
Possessive Determiners 36
Quantifiers 36

4 Pronouns 41
Personal Pronouns 41
Possessives 42
Reflexive Pronouns 43
Indefinite Pronouns 43
Relative Pronouns and Relative Clauses 45
Relative Clauses 47

5 Verbs 49
Some Terminology 49
The Simple Present 53
The Present Progressive 53
The Simple Past 54
The Past Progressive 54
The Present Perfect 55
The Past Perfect 55
The Present Perfect Progressive 55
The Past Perfect Progressive 55
The Verb Forms Compared 56
Contrastive Points 57
Think About It 58

6 Concord 61
Why Can Concord Be Difficult? 61
How Important Is Concord? 62
Think About It 64
Some Special Cases 64

7 The Passive 69
Contrastive Point 71

8 Referring to the Future 73
The Simple Present 74
The Present Progressive 74
Will/Shall/'ll + Infinitive 74
Will/Shall + Progressive Infinitive 75
Be Going to + Infinitive 75
Be to + Infinitive 76
Future Referring Structures Compared and Contrasted 76

9 Adjectives and Adverbs 79
Comparative and Superlative Forms of Adjectives 79
The Comparative and Superlative Forms with -er/-est 79
Comparative and Superlative Forms With More and Most 80
Comparative Form and Superlative Form (Irregular Comparisons) 80
Order of Adjectives 80
Adjectives Only Used Predicatively 81
Adverbs 82
Position 84
Words That Are Both Adjectives and Adverbs 85
Adverb Pairs 85
Adjectives That Look Like Adverbs 85

10 Prepositions 87
What Are the Main Problems That Prepositions Can Involve? 87

11 Clause Elements 93
Verbal (V) 93
Direct Object (DO) 93
Indirect Object (IO) 94
Subject Predicative (SP) 94
Object Predicative (OP) 95
Adverbials 95
A Couple of Reminders 95

12 Dependent Clauses 99
Adverbial Clauses 99
Nominal Clauses 99
Adjectival Clauses 100
Non-finite Clauses 100

13 Word Order 105
Inversion 105
Verb-Second Inversion 106
Verb-Second Inversion in English 107
Reporting Clauses 108

14 It and There 111
There 111
"It" Can Be Used in Several Ways 112
Anticipatory It 113

15 The -ing Form of the Verb 115
The Progressive Aspect 115
As an Adjective 115
After Certain Verbs 115
What Kind of Verbs Are Followed by the -ing Participle? 116

16 Spelling 119
Capital Letters 119
Y or IE? 120
Double or Not? 120
al- and -ful 121
"I" Before "E" Except after "C" 121
The Apostrophe 122
British and American Spelling 123
Commonly Confused Words 124

17 Punctuation 127
The Comma 127
Question Mark 129
Exclamation Mark 129
The Colon 130

18 Text Production 133
Style or Register 133
Sentences 134
Paragraphs 135
Variety 136
Cohesion 136

19 Appendix 139
List of the Most Common Irregular Verbs 139
Irregular Plural Nouns 141
Nouns Ending in -o 141
Nouns Ending in -ance or -ence 142
Nationality Words 142
Prepositions in Set Expressions 144
Important Grammatical Terminology 146

KEY to Test Yourself Exercises .. 147
Chapter 1 Words and Phrases 147
Chapter 2 Nouns 147
Chapter 3 Determiners..... 148
Chapter 4 Pronouns 149
Chapter 5 Verbs..... 150
Chapter 6 Concord..... 150
Chapter 7 The Passive 151
Chapter 8 The Future 151
Chapter 9 Adjectives and Adverbs.... 152
Chapter 10 Prepositions..... 152
Chapter 11 Clause Elements 153
Chapter 12 Dependent Clauses 153
Chapter 13 Word Order..... 154
Chapter 14 IT and THERE..... 154
Chapter 15 The -ing Form of the Verb .. 155
Chapter 16 Spelling..... 155
Chapter 17 Punctuation..... 156
Chapter 18 Text Production..... 156

PART 2 / Oral English / Phonetics

20 Introduction to Oral English 161
English as a World Language..... 161
Do You Speak English – in the Classroom? English as a "School Language" 163

21 The Sound Factory..... 167

22 The Sounds of English..... 171

23 Sound-to-Spelling (or Spelling-to-Sound)..... 175

24 Phonemic Script..... 179
The Use of Phonemic Script to Help with Pronunciation..... 179

25 The English Consonants 181
Consonants and Norwegian Learners' Problems..... 184

26 The English Vowels..... 193
Vowels – Norwegian Learners' Problems..... 197

27 The Rhythm of Language 203
Word Stress 204
Word Stress vs Sentence Stress 206

28 Sounds Together 211
Linking /r/ (BE Only) 212

29 The Music of Language 215

30 Language Variation and Change 225
Variation in the British Isles..... 227
Variations in the USA..... 230

31 Appendix Oral English / Phonetics..... 235
Identifying Words 235
/s/ – /z/. Can You Tell from Spelling? 236
Word Identification 236
Labelling Consonants..... 237
Pronunciations of "-ed Endings"..... 237
Number of Syllables 237
Sentence transcription..... 238
Linking r Exercise (BE Only – all <r>'s Pronounced in AE) 238

32 Further exercises 239
Identification of Words and Sentences Written in Phonemic Script..... 239

Key to further exercises 243

References 247

PART ONE / Grammar

WHAT IS GRAMMAR?

The Oxford Dictionary defines grammar as "the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics". A more simple definition would be to say that grammar defines the ways that words are put together to express meaning in a language.

The word grammar is not mentioned in the English curriculum, but it states quite clearly that by the end of Year Seven, pupils should be able to "bruke grunnleggende mønstre for rettskriving, ordbøying, setnings- og tekstbygging i produksjon av tekst". These are the same features of language that we find in a dictionary definition of the word grammar. How can we help our pupils achieve these skills without teaching grammar? We can't. The question is: how do we teach grammar?

In earlier times, it was not uncommon for grammar to be taught as something separate from the rest of the language learning activities. Texts and sentences were made with the sole purpose of illustrating some grammatical feature, for example was/were, who/which, it/there etc. Teachers often noticed that pupils who had a maximum score on the gap-filling or multiple choice tests still made the same mistakes when writing their own texts. In other words, learning to pick the right word does not necessarily mean that the grammar feature has become fully integrated into the pupil's language. To make matters worse, grammar was frequently seen by pupils as boring and confusing.

Today most teachers agree that grammar should not be taught in isolation, but as an integrated part of the language-learning process. It should be seen by pupils as a useful tool rather than a hindrance. For a teacher, it is important to ensure that incorrect usage does not become part of a pupil's language which it can be difficult to remove later. On the other hand, correcting mistakes should not be done in such a way as it demotivates the pupil or gives rise to insecurity. Making mistakes is also a part of any learning process, especially when new items are being learnt. For example, it is more important that a pupil starts experimenting with relative clauses than that the correct relative pronoun is used in every case.

For the younger pupils, explanations should not be too theoretical. Learning a foreign language is and should be an exciting experience. Part of what makes language learning exciting for pupils is when they discover the rules, see similarities and differences, and

understand a text which they are interested in. These aspects should therefore play a central role in their language learning.

Since all pupils are different, it is inevitable that some methods will work better for some than for others. For this reason, it is important that we vary the methods that we use in the classroom. We can find new ideas by looking at other course books than the one we use in class, or talk to colleagues, either face-to-face or on social media.

We hope that you will try out some of the activities and approaches that we suggest in this book.

1

Words and Phrases

Polonius: "What do you read, my Lord?"
Hamlet: "Words, words, words."

(From Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2)

In this chapter we shall introduce you to some useful terminology which we need when we are discussing certain aspects of grammar. These are:

- Words
- Phrases
- Clauses
- Sentences

WORDS

Words are the most basic building blocks in a text. Words can join with other words to form phrases. Phrases join forces to form clauses and sentences. Sentences can form paragraphs, which again are usually part of a longer text. The word "text", by the way, is related to "textile" (from the Latin "texere", to weave), and writers weave words, phrases and sentences together to make their text. In this chapter we shall be looking at words and phrases.

We usually distinguish between two groups of words: lexical words and function words. Lexical words are those with meaning, namely nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

All the other types of words – pronouns, prepositions, determiners, conjunctions etc. – are function words. They also have some degree of meaning, but their main job is to combine with lexical words to form phrases and sentences.

Let us look at two versions of the same sentence, one with just the lexical words, the other with only the function words:

The complete sentence is:
Suddenly a member of the audience fainted, and the speaker asked if there was a doctor present.

With only lexical words:
Suddenly member audience fainted speaker asked doctor was present.

With only the function words:
a of the and the if there a.

As you can see, the lexical words on their own give a rough idea of the situation, whereas the function words on their own are literally meaningless.

Lexical word classes are by far the largest. Moreover, they are open, which means that new nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs can be made or borrowed. Some examples of fairly new words in English include: app, Google, clickbait, Brexit, photobomb.

Function words, on the other hand, are much smaller classes, and it is extremely unusual for new members to be admitted. English, just like any other language, has enough pronouns, prepositions and determiners and does not need any new ones. A notable exception to this "rule" is the fact that a new gender-neutral pronoun has been launched in English. Whether or not "ze" will catch on, however, is an open question.

WORD CLASSES

It is important to be familiar with word classes for a couple of reasons. For one thing, without an understanding of word classes, looking up words in a dictionary can easily become something of a lottery. Secondly, many of the grammatical explanations in this book require a basic understanding of word classes. We shall now look briefly at English word classes, most of which will also be dealt with in more detail in later chapters in this book.

Lexical words

Nouns

Nouns are the names we give to animals, things, people, ideas, places, organizations etc: cat, house, child, love, democracy, England, the United Nations

Most nouns are *common nouns* and are spelt with a small letter. *Proper nouns* are names of someone or something specific: John, Jane, Paris, India etc. (The word "proper", by the way, is related to "property", because the name belongs to someone or something.)

Verbs

Most verbs are lexical words and carry meaning. The meaning can have to do with actions and conditions: love, hate, discover, eat, freeze, consider, believe, be, have. (Be and have can also be used as auxiliaries, see below.)

Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe a noun or a pronoun: she is *intelligent*, that was *interesting*, a *black* cat, a *large* house, *true* love

Adverbs

There are several types of adverbs.

Adverbs of manner give more information about a verb: They ran *quickly*. She spoke *clearly*. I answered *politely*.

Adverbs of degree occur with adjectives or other adverbs: *extremely* happy, *rather* cold, *dreadfully* sad. They ran *very quickly*. She spoke *quite clearly*. I answered *fairly politely*.

Adverbs can also make a comment on a complete statement: unfortunately, luckily, apparently, obviously etc.

Adverbs can also say something about place and time: here, there, now, later, tomorrow, yesterday.

Function words

Determiner

Determiners occur in noun phrases: a girl, an old city, the reason, their new car, two red roosters, that idea, these people, some books.

Pronoun

Pronouns are used instead of nouns: he/she, nobody, everything, who/which, that/those etc.

Auxiliary verbs

The word "auxiliary" means "assistant", and auxiliary verbs are used with lexical verbs. There are two types of auxiliary verbs:

Modal auxiliaries: can/could, will/would, shall/should, may/might, must.

Grammatical auxiliaries: BE and HAVE, which can be auxiliary verbs as well as lexical verbs.

BE:

Nobody knows when the wheel was invented. (Forming the passive)

I am finishing that report tomorrow. (Forming the progressive)

HAVE:

Elvis has left the building. (Forming the present perfect)

Prepositions

Prepositions are small words that say something about time, place and other relationships: in August, at Christmas, on Monday, under the table, behind the door, during the war, after the break etc.

Co-ordinating conjunctions

These words link words, clauses and sentences: and, or, nor, but.

Subordinating conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions introduce dependent clauses: although, because, since, when, before etc.

Existential there

Once upon a time, there was a wise old king …

Infinitive marker "to"

To be or not to be, that is the question.

You have probably noticed that some words can belong to different word classes. "Love" can be a noun and a verb. "That" can be a determiner, conjunction, personal pronoun, relative pronoun and adverb.

The word "well" can also belong to five word classes:

- You look well. (adjective)
- Kim writes well. (adverb)
- We get our water from a well. (noun)
- He felt tears begin to well up in his eyes. (verb)
- Well, you are a sight for sore eyes! (interjection)

PHRASES

Phrases can be very short (only one word), or much longer. A phrase will typically consist of several words that belong together, in the sense that they form a meaningful unit. There are five types of phrases: noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase and prepositional phrase. If the most important word in the phrase is a noun or

pronoun, it is a noun phrase. If the most important word is an adjective, it is an adjective phrase, and so on.

Noun phrases

Here are some examples:

- He
- That chap
- That grumpy-looking chap
- That grumpy-looking chap in the corner

Verb phrases

- He *read* the report
- He *has read* the report
- He *has been reading* the report
- He *must have been reading* the report

Adjective phrases

- Exciting
- More exciting
- Far more exciting
- Far more exciting than I had imagined

Adverb phrases

- Thoroughly
- Very thoroughly
- As thoroughly as she could
- As thoroughly as was humanly possible

Prepositional phrases

- at last
- in the end
- before the beginning of March
- on the table
- on the other hand
- in my opinion
- in the kitchen