

**Bent Preisler: *A Handbook of English Grammar on Functional Principles*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997 (second edition)**

Apart from minor changes and corrections, the second edition of *A Handbook of English Grammar on Functional Principles* (in the following referred to as HEG) is identical to the first, which was published in 1992. As stated in the preface, and as signalled by the word *functional* in the title, the conceptual framework of HEG is based on the work of Halliday. The basic structure derives from *Kompendium i Engelsk Grammatik* (Arndt, Preisler & Østergaard 1977), but HEG is an independent and somewhat shorter new book. Its intended audience are advanced students of English, and it was written to bridge the gap between short grammars like *Rediscover Grammar with David Crystal* and Quirk & Greenbaum's *A University Grammar of English* (in 1990 supplanted by Greenbaum & Quirk's *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*). As far as Danish students of English are concerned, this gap might be said to have been bridged already by Torben Vestergaard's *Engelsk Grammatik* (1985), but HEG is special in a number of ways.

For one thing, HEG accounts systematically for differences between American English and British English, and in so doing it provides a wealth of useful information. In addition to covering conspicuous and therefore familiar differences like the ones pertaining to the use of the subjunctive and of the present perfect vs. the past tense, it provides information on, for example, time adverbials realized with or without a preposition (BrE *The department is open on Saturdays* : AmE *The department is open Saturdays*), expressions of clock time (BrE *A quarter past two* : AmE *A quarter after/past two*), use of the definite article (BrE *He is in hospital* : AmE *He is in the hospital*), and use in American English of *any* and *some* as adverbs of degree (*Then she cried some, but it didn't bother me any*) and of *enough* postmodified by a *that*-clause (*people with enough skills that the State wants to look after them*). HEG is therefore just as useful to students with an American orientation as to students with a British orientation, and there is no doubt that Preisler is thoroughly conversant with the grammatical differences between the two major varieties of English. Being aimed at foreign learners of all sorts as well as native speakers of English, HEG does not, however, provide information about Danish. In my view Danish students will therefore need to supplement their study of HEG with that of contrastive English-Danish material.

The structure of the book is clear and straightforward. After a brief introduction (19-25) we start from above with the clause in chapter II (26-75). Here the structure and functions of the clause, order of clause constituents, clause types and the semantics of the clause are covered. The rest of the book is devoted to phrases: the verb phrase in chapter III (76-133), the noun phrase (in-

cluding the prepositional phrase) in chapter IV (134-188), pronouns and pronominal noun phrases in chapter V (189-241) and the adjective/adverb phrase in chapter VI (242-262). Inflectional morphology is only touched on briefly and derivational morphology not at all. On the other hand, pragmatics and textual factors are on and off taken into consideration. HEG provides a relatively detailed list of contents (9-16), a table of abbreviations and symbols (17), a short bibliography with only 28 references (263-4) and a long and highly useful index of linguistic forms and grammatical concepts (265-288). If the reader wishes to use HEG as a reference grammar and investigate, for example, what there is to be said about a word like *mackerel* and a topic like modality and negation, he can do so easily by consulting the index.

Unlike many recent grammars of English, HEG is not corpus-driven. I fully accept Preisler's reasons (stated on p. 6) for choosing not to base his grammar on a particular corpus, namely that unedited corpus examples usually contain other problems than the ones the student is supposed to focus on and that they are often incomprehensible out of context or contain too much irrelevant material. Data should secure analytical breadth and precision as well as exemplification, and whether the examples used are derived from corpora, authentic texts, elicitation or introspection does not really matter as long as they are relevant to the description of grammar in all its aspects (Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1997: 2f).

In its analytical choices, HEG may be said to be neo-traditional, for the choices made are largely ones on which there is broad consensus in grammars of English from the last decades, for example those by Quirk and his co-authors. For one thing, the categories of the verb are interpreted as binary: there are two tenses (past and present), perfect vs. nonperfect aspect (+/- relational perspective) and progressive vs. nonprogressive aspect (+/- situational perspective). For another, HEG recognizes both one-word clauses and one-word phrases. An utterance like *Go!*, for example, is analysed as a clause realized by a verb phrase (not as a directive realized by a word). I know from experience that it requires a good deal of explaining to persuade students that in a clause like *Undergraduates read articles carefully* the subject, verbal, object and adverbial are realized not by a noun, a verb, a noun and an adverb respectively but by a noun phrase, a verb phrase, a noun phrase and an adverb phrase. The justification given in HEG is that each of the constituents can be expanded into phrases: *Few undergraduates here/ would read/ such articles/ very carefully*. The approach adopted, then, is to say that in *Undergraduates read articles carefully* the only constituent of each phrase is the head. Yet another neo-traditional choice is to interpret actionality as a property of the verb (92ff) and to say, for example, that *My heart belongs to Daddy* contains a stative relational verb and *He knocked me on the head* a dynamic momentary verb. How-

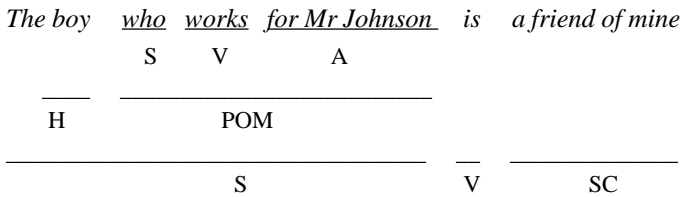
ever, it is in fact problematic to talk about verb classes like ‘stative relational verbs’ and ‘dynamic momentary verbs’, even with the proviso that “[o]ften the same verb can be used either dynamically or statively” (93). What the action category allows us to do is to classify *situations*, not verbs. Though the choice of lexical verb is obviously important for the type of situation described, so are a number of other factors: inflectional form (e.g. progressive/nonprogressive), syntactic relations (e.g. presence or absence of a direct object) and the extra-linguistic context in which the clause is used (see Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1997: 195f).

A few other analytical choices deserve mention too. The prepositional phrase is not treated as a separate structural category but as a noun phrase, due to the fact that the introductory junctive has no effect on the structure of the phrase (134). Secondly, and no doubt related to this, HEG recognizes indirect objects realized by junctive + noun phrase, as in ‘The old lady gave a ring *to the little girl*’ and ‘The old lady bought a ring *for the little girl*’ (28). In this respect HEG differs from a number of other grammars which analyse the constituents in italics as adverbials. One wonders, incidentally, how Preisler would analyse a sentence like *The old lady bought John a ring for his little girl*. Thirdly, HEG operates with discontinuity in examples like *He appeared to be mad*, where the subject is assumed to be realized not by *He* but by the discontinuous infinitive clause *He ... to be mad* (40f). Though this analysis violates the rule that clauses as subject take a 3rd person singular verb (82), for example in *They appear to be mad*, a subject test like ‘Who or what V?’ supports this analysis, for what ‘appears’ in the example just given is obviously not *They* but *They ... to be mad*.

In examples like *George will be fifty next year* the auxiliary WILL is interpreted not as a future form but as an epistemic modal expressing confidence. On p.103 it is stated that future events are by definition non-factual but that they can be *represented* as factual. The way to do this, we are informed, is to use the simple present form (*Kathy arrives tomorrow*), not a WILL-construction, which signals a more subjective prediction (*Kathy will arrive tomorrow*). I have myself argued against the neo-traditional relegation of non-volitional WILL to the province of modality and emphasized that this auxiliary signals categorial commitment (Davidsen-Nielsen 1988). In my view, the future situation is thus represented as factual not only in *Kathy arrives tomorrow* but also in *Kathy will arrive tomorrow*. The difference between the two constructions is that the one in the simple present (restricted to those relatively few cases where something planned is involved, where the actionality of the sentence is dynamic, and where there is a future time adverbial) instructs the hearer to think of the present time and then (by means of TOMORROW) to look ahead to a specific point in time. The WILL construction also instructs the hearer to

think of the present time and then to look ahead. But the latter instruction is given doubly: generally by means of WILL and specifically by means of TOMORROW (see Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1997: 292). In my view, the unmarked way of representing a future situation as factual in English is by means of WILL (note, for example, that *Kathy will arrive* and *It will be difficult* cannot be replaced by *Kathy arrives* and *It is difficult*). For a very recent discussion of futurity in English the reader is referred to Harder (1997).

In the chapter on the clause, syntactic analysis naturally occupies a prominent position. What is striking here is that the examples given are only analysed with respect to function. The manner in which this is done can be illustrated by the following example (47):



What is not shown, then, is the form realizing each of the functions (for example, A realized by a noun phrase introduced by a junctive). So when it is stated in the preface that “[e]xplicit clause and phrase analyses are employed throughout” (6), this means explicit with respect to syntactic functions. Though the distinction between form and function is explained clearly already in the introductory chapter, it is so fundamental that I would have liked to see it reflected in at least some tree diagrams showing both form and function on each level of analysis.

HEG is an intermediate-length book (288 pages) aimed primarily at undergraduate students, and competing analyses are therefore not discussed. Furthermore, some topics are dealt with very briefly. This in particular goes for the passive (67). As for minor queries, I fail to see why an example like *The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and London was standing on the Thames* should be considered ungrammatical (98). It is not all that difficult to think of a situational context in which the use of the progressive in the final clause is acceptable together with the preceding progressives. Note in this connection that insertion of the word *still* before *standing* makes the example completely natural. And note furthermore that *The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and London stood on the Thames* with a nonprogressive form in the last clause is more awkward. An error occurs on p.132, where WILL is said to refer to 2nd and 3rd rather than 1st and 3rd person willingness, but otherwise HEG is remarkably free of errors.

HEG is composed of paragraphs many of which are only a few lines long. The advantages connected with this type of structure are economy of presentation and easy access to specific information. The price which has to be paid is that coherent discussion of grammatical topics tends to be hampered and that transitions are sometimes abrupt. Personally I prefer a grammar to be structured into longer stretches of text, but whether one or the other type of composition is considered preferable is naturally largely a matter of taste.

As appears, the reservations I have about HEG are few, and some of them relate to analytical choices which are open to discussion. When reading HEG one soon discovers that its author is a true professional. All the important areas of English syntax are covered, and the presentation is careful and precise. HEG is also a pedagogical book, though not in the sense that reading it is smooth sailing throughout. For example, the Reichenbachian account of past, present and future time takes the reader into choppy waters and is likely to cause trouble to most undergraduate students. But then any non-superficial account of time perspective in English is bound to be difficult, and on the level he has chosen Preisler is consistently a clear writer. In future editions I suggest that the examples be printed in the same way as the text. Though the typewritten examples are not hard to read, the reader is entitled to a higher standard of typography in a book which costs 248 kroner. As mentioned above, I also recommend insertion of tree diagrams in which not only functions but also forms are represented.

My conclusion is that HEG is clearly a very good book which can be recommended both to dedicated undergraduate students and - if accompanied by other grammatical studies of English - to postgraduate students.

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