

**Angela Downing and Phillip Locke 2006: *English Grammar: A University Course*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 610pp + xxii. ISBN 9-78-0-415-28787-6 (pbk) and 9-78-0-415-28787-9 (hbk)**

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English grammar continues to be big business. On the one hand, the last ten years have seen the publication of a range of new reference grammars: while Huddleston and Pullum (2002) have sought to provide a more theoretically coherent account than Quirk et al. (1985), the impressive works by Biber et al. (1999) and most recently by Carter and McCarthy (2006) have presented a more discourse and usage-based grammatical account. On the other hand, the practical end of the grammar market has also continued to present a wide range of course books for advanced students (e.g. Foley and Hall 2003, Hewings 2005), in which the major features of the system of English are broken down into small easy-to-digest units, with lots of more or less traditional exercise material. In between the all-embracing reference grammar and the highly selective, skills-oriented, practical course, a rather unique position is taken by Downing and Locke's *English Grammar: A University Course* (2006) (henceforth D&L), which has appeared in a long-awaited second edition.

D&L is extensive in its coverage of the language, organized in 12 chapters and 60 modules. But despite its accessibility and lucid modular organization, this is still a mighty 600 pages of a grammar course, and perhaps that in itself is enough to suggest that "an intermediate standard of knowledge and practical handling of the language" ('Introduction', xvii to xviii) is an understatement of what may be required to tackle the book successfully. My own experience with teaching the first edition (Downing and Locke 1992) in the Netherlands was that it is best suited as a second or third year course, used as a follow-up to a first year introductory course.

The book introduces four units of grammatical analysis – clause, group (the Hallidayan equivalent of phrase), word and morpheme – but deals essentially with the units of clause and group (2006: 11-12), with a rather marked role for the clause. Perhaps surprisingly, the treatment of clausal matters precedes the treatment of group matters, something that the reader may have to get used to given the traditional approach in grammar books where phrasal matters are considered first and clausal and sentential matters later. The consequence is that the book starts with a syntax perspective, moves to a semantic one, then on to a pragmatic one, and then for the last five chapters returns to syntax, although admittedly there is a strong focus in these chapters on the interrelation of form, function and semantics. Fortunately, this is explained early on (xviii). But the dominance of the clause also lies in the rich content of Chapters 4 through 7, which cover process types and semantic roles, clause types and speech acts, information packaging, and clause combining. These chapters contribute significantly towards defining the unique scope of this book, containing as they do 24 separate modules in 200 pages on the semantics and pragmatics of the English sentence. By contrast, Biber et al.'s (2002) excellent 500-page and 50-module *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* devotes just 5 modules to this area, covering

clause types and information packaging but more or less neglecting process types and the semantic and rhetorical aspects of clause combining.

In all, D&L not only pays considerable attention to the clause; it also interrelates syntax, semantics and pragmatics in a more holistic fashion rather than describing everything from the point of view of the syntax. This is clear from the titles of many of the units, more than a quarter of which involve *-ing* constructions such as 'Organising our Experience of Events', 'Elaborating the Message', and 'Describing and Classifying the Referent'. In terms of approach, D&L is thus broadly communicative and functional. It is clearly indebted to Hallidayan functionalism but also draws from other functionalist research.

But D&L is not a grammar, nor is it a functionally oriented grammar textbook along the lines of Bloor and Bloor (2004). Despite the length, it is indeed a course in grammar. The title states as much, but it is important to stress this. So what is it that sets a university grammar course off from a reference grammar or a purely skills-oriented course book, and how successful might D&L prove to be in this regard? In the rest of this review I would like to concentrate on two aspects of this. First I will look briefly at the extent to which D&L might succeed in being didactically responsible and, secondly I will consider the ways in which it might in terms of content and presentation play a valuable role in an integrated university language curriculum.

As a course in grammar, D&L needs to be teachable and usable, and it needs to engage its readers. With its summaries, terminological framework, textual examples, exercises and keys, further reading, attractive and vastly improved layout, innovative chapter and module organization, and perhaps above all its engaging narrative style, I feel that this book does indeed offer an excellent basic framework for a really usable course book at the highest level of English language study.

There have been changes in terminology in the second edition, perhaps a rather dangerous undertaking if not all students in a group are using the same edition, but in this case it appears to be a generally valuable operation from a didactic point of view. For instance, Module 8, which in the first edition was about Adjuncts, Disjuncts and Conjuncts, treats all three as different types of adjunct. Disjunct has in my own teaching experience always been difficult to get across to students, who struggle to get their heads round the *dis-* element. And Conjunct, though much easier to understand as a term, is easily confused with conjunction, a confusion which in fact was present in the first edition itself but has now happily been repaired. Another terminological adjustment occurs in Chapter 5, where the subtitle from the first edition, 'Mood Structures of the Clause' makes way for 'Linking Speech Acts and Grammar', which not only captures the new content of the chapter very well, but also pushes the Hallidayan notion of mood relatively into the background for the rest of the chapter. This also seems a good move, because mood is not a term that plays a major role in general linguistic descriptions of the form-function interplay in terms of grammar and discourse. Finally, for Chapter 7, 'Expanding the Message', the notion of the clause complex has been discarded and the complex sentence takes over as the superordinate expression for the discussion of clause combining. In both first and second editions there is a useful presentation of the different uses of the notion of sentence, and it remains a problematic concept; nevertheless, it seems wise to retain such an all-embracing and widely used notion with a clear definition of its application rather than opting for the

specifically Hallidayan notion of the clause complex. All in all, the reworking of basic concepts in the course has made the terminological framework more accessible, and may well prove worth the risk in practice.

Equally crucial for teachability and usability are examples and exercises. What is good about the examples is that a wide variety of text types are represented, that many examples have been taken from corpora, and that many examples are neat segments of text which are also commented on, rather than the single clauses and sentences which are typically the only form of example found in reference grammars. With regard to exercises there is an adequate set of open items which allow students to carry out small-scale data analysis themselves, alongside a range of more traditional exercises which couple language production with practice in applying the concepts and conceptual distinctions introduced in the relevant chapters. It is also pleasing to note that specific answers in the exercise keys are complemented by comments which, where relevant, explain the answer or clarify why more than one analysis might be possible.

All these features, together with the lucid and engaging prose which tells stories on top of describing structures, go to make for a course book that really provides the materials for an actual course. In this light, it is then perhaps only a minor shortcoming that a glossary of the most important concepts has not been included. While a lot of the terminology on offer in D&L may have been encountered in students' earlier grammar courses, a lot of it will be new. The terminology introduced is clearly explained at every initial point in the book, but the lack of a glossary remains unfortunate, since every course book that forms the basis of examinations benefits from one.

I now turn to matters of content. First, as explained in the Preface to the Second Edition, let me record that a number of significant changes have been made to the first edition with regard to the organization of content. The adjectival and adverbial groups are treated together in one chapter, with the prepositional phrase now forming the final chapter on its own. Another change is that negation has been removed from Chapter 5 on clause types, where it did not really belong, and has been moved forward to Chapter 1. As a result, Chapter 5 has been considerably reworked and now presents a more coherent approach to clause types and how they are used to perform different kinds of speech act. Overall, this is a second edition which constitutes a considerable reworking of much content, based on new insights from research over the last ten or so years.

Bringing the content up to date was a necessary step for a long-awaited second edition, but what I am particularly interested in here is whether the content and its presentation are conducive to integration in a contemporary university English curriculum. Recent developments in European higher education have provided a massive impulse to curriculum planning, specifically through the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001) and the whole Bologna process, in particular the formulation of generalized qualifications for higher education in the form of the Dublin descriptors (Joint Quality Initiative 2004).

On the one hand, these developments relate to communicative competence. The CEFR details the kinds of individual competences necessary to develop communicative competence. From the descriptions of written competences at the C1 and C2 levels which will be aspired to in BA, Master and other Postgraduate programmes across Europe, it may be concluded that a wide grammatical repertoire is absolutely essential. For instance, writers at C2 "can provide an appropriate and effective logical structure

which helps the reader to find significant points”, for which information packaging techniques must be mastered (2001: 62). A consequence is that grammar has to be presented in a way which will allow students to profit from it in a skills-oriented environment, a notion which underlies the ‘syntax for writing’ courses in American universities (cf. Hinkel 2004).

The qualifications specified in the Dublin descriptors also include communicative skills but in addition relate separately to domain-specific knowledge and to the application of that knowledge. A consequence of this last descriptor in particular is that BA programmes need to include courses which give students support for, and practice in, carrying out small-scale linguistic investigations of their own. If we factor in the increased interest within linguistics in language use and the wide availability of language corpora, then we may expect many contemporary language curricula to give much more opportunity for students to do small-scale linguistic research on authentic language data than was the case say 15 years ago. There is a clear role here for a strong grammar course which can provide students with the knowledge base they need to carry out their own linguistic analysis, and preferably a course which is organized to promote such work.

Let us take three areas of the grammar and consider whether the material presented permits links to be forged to high-level skills development on the one hand and small-scale linguistic research on the other. I will briefly consider (a) premodification of the noun phrase (Module 48), (b) the passive (Module 30.3), and (c) clause combining (Chapter 7, Modules 31-36).

A detailed presentation of premodification is called for because it is a popular area of analysis for students interested in investigating English in use, for instance the language of advertisements and other persuasive texts. One of the basic things students actually need to do here is identify what counts as an adjective in premodified NPs and what does not, and further to distinguish between evaluative and descriptive uses of premodifiers. They need to know that gathering and organizing data is often by no means as easy and mechanical as it sounds, not even as far as identifying types of premodifier is concerned.

Biber *et al.* (2002: 272-79) in their student grammar offer an 8-page grammar module dedicated to premodification which takes structural types as its starting point and makes use of frequency information on the four registers treated by the grammar, something which D&L cannot offer. The module notes especially productive premodifiers such as *car* and *school* and gives a wide-ranging overview of the meaning relations holding between noun premodifiers and their heads. There is further information on plural premodifiers and a brief note about descriptive adjectives preceding classifier adjectives, as in *shabby black clothes*.

By contrast, D&L’s account in Module 48 immediately distinguishes two premodifier functions, labelled classifier and epithet, and provides a compact discussion of the further distinction between descriptive and evaluative adjectives and participles functioning as epithets. The discussion directs the student’s attention to the problems involved in interpreting the adjective, stressing that there is no rigid set of descriptive adjectives and equally rigid set of evaluative ones. In addition, the point is made that adjectives can function both as epithets and classifiers. The picture that is painted is

complex, but it is the picture that students need if in a more investigative context they are going to have to analyse texts themselves.

There is also a fair amount of detail when it comes to the ordering of premodifiers, and semantic criteria are identified to explain the orderings we find and tend not to find – *a beautiful hand-painted blue earthenware vase*, for instance, has the classifier closest to the head, preceded by the colour (=objective) adjective, preceded by the participle, preceded by the attitudinal (=subjective) adjective. Compared with Biber *et al.* (2002) it seems that more detail is provided and more insight is offered into the relation between form and meaning.

One area of English grammar that receives treatment in every kind of grammatical account – whatever the perspective, whatever the scope – is the passive. In a functionally based grammar one may expect a treatment which takes into account the contexts in which both passive and active are used, and what effects are created by using the passive. This allows students to critically analyse the use of the passive in texts belonging to different text types. But from the point of view of language production and the development of a writing style, students also need to have a detailed account which can counter the advice offered in more traditional style guides, and perhaps by more traditional teachers, who may generally emphasize the value of the active over the passive.

D&L takes an appropriate starting position by positioning the main treatment of the active-passive alternative in the context of Module 30, on the interplay of theme/rheme and given/new, and by stressing that the alternative “allows speakers and writers to exploit the two main positions in the clause, the beginning and the end” (2006: 253). There is then a treatment of the individual discourse motivations for the use of the passive. The picture created is one where syntactic choice, information structure and wider communicative aims are brought together. The student can begin to appreciate the different motivations behind the choice of active and passive, the short and long passive and the *be-* and *get-*passive.

In comparison with, for instance, Carter and McCarthy's (2006: 793-802) up-to-date and very comprehensive grammar, which like D&L also regards the grammar of choice as equal in value to the grammar of structure (2006: 7), D&L's account is perhaps more fragmented because structural aspects do not form the starting point for the treatment. And it is unfortunate that D&L does not include in this chapter information about common verbs used with particular kinds of passive, or about verbs which are usually only found in the passive.<sup>†</sup> However, the discussion in D&L of the choice between active and passive is richer than the note-like account given by Carter and McCarthy.

For a third and final example, I turn to Chapter 7 of D&L, which is an extensive treatment of clause combining. For developing discourse competence at the C1 and C2 mastery levels writers need a broad repertoire of linguistic devices which they can make use of for creating particular communicative effects in a wide range of different genres. For creating coherent text at advanced levels, a crucial distinction is needed between expressing what is important and what is in various ways less important; in addition

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<sup>†</sup> Editors' note: This information is found in chapter 3, 'The Development of the Message, complementation of the verb', Modules 10, 11 and 12.

one needs to be able to express meaning relationships between communicative acts and elements thereof in a precise and subtle fashion. This means that a grammar course must pay substantial attention to matters of the complex sentence, and preferably do this not only from the point of view of the treatment of individual grammatical constructions but also, and perhaps even more importantly, from the point of view of the kinds of meaning relationships.

This is precisely what D&L does, and does well. It opens with the essential presentation of different views on the notion of sentence and goes on to detail the notion of dependency. With a clear debt to Hallidayan functionalism, the chapter then describes different kinds of clause combining, not on the basis of individual structures but starting from what the authors call semantic relationships, where the term semantic should be interpreted rather broadly, since it is used to include rhetorical notions like restatement and explanation.

This has a double advantage. First it lays out a framework for students to do their own text analysis because they will be able to recognize a wide range of combining devices, involving both coordination and subordination, and be able to categorize them. Second, it gives the writing student a repertoire of constructions for expressing specific relations, and allows the student to compare the effects of two or more constructions that can be basically used to express the same relation. A major feature of this approach is that it is not only relative and finite adverbial clauses that are presented in this context; also non-finite and non-verbal constructions such as appositions are considered from one and the same perspective. If made full use of, this can offer the skills-acquiring student a much richer base for developing discourse competence than the standard clause combining approach used in traditional composition handbook exercises.

In conclusion, this new edition of Downing and Locke's grammar continues to differ in a rather fundamental way from comprehensive grammars, grammar textbooks and advanced grammar course books. It is most decidedly not a grammar skills course and it is not a textbook. It comes closest to a rather comprehensive grammar supplemented by a workbook. But it does everything in one go, and it is so much more than just a description of the structures of the language with commentary on the uses to which the structures are put. Crucially, it presents a number of chapters which are centred around what we do with language – talk about our experience of the world, perform communicative acts, organize our information for communicative effect and combine our messages into textual units – and tells us what structures are available for helping us do these things. In this sense it comes close to the 'grammar in use' component of Leech and Svartvik's (2003) *A communicative grammar of English*. Thus where 'grammar books' basically describe structures or at the most go from form to function, D&L, where relevant, also goes from function to form.

The book's subtitle, *A University Course*, is key to understanding its position. It is a course book with a breadth, design and, above all, a language of explanation and commentary which make the content eminently teachable and usable. Admittedly, certain elements of grammar may have warranted more space than they were given (arguably the case with object postponement, which is limited to a discussion of objects of ditransitive verbs). Admittedly, systematic information on frequency in different text types and different modes is lacking. And admittedly, the opportunity to offer students

specific help in terms of developing their own language production has not been specifically taken up. But it is the combination of what D&L does do that gives it an extra value and affords it a place in an integrated language curriculum. The book is therefore to be warmly recommended for advanced students of English who realise the importance of grammatical knowledge, not only for developing their own language skills but also for providing a solid basis for carrying out their own linguistic data analysis, which since the first edition of the book has happily come to play a more prominent role in university language study.

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