
*English Syntax* is Baker’s revised edition of his much widely celebrated English grammar with the same title published in 1989. It is the aim of the author to provide the reader with a descriptive overview of English syntax, that is, of how English sentences are formed. Baker is not interested in showing or defining proper English usage, but in understanding the structure of uncontroversially acceptable sentences.

The book consists of five parts, two appendices and an index. Part I includes one single chapter, “Introduction”, in which the author posits the central purpose of the book. In writing *English Syntax*, Baker sets out to give a preliminary idea of the role of English syntax within the framework of modern linguistics, among other things by drawing a comparison with traditional textbooks on English grammar. The approach adopted by Baker falls within the spirit of generative linguistics.

Part II, “The Syntax of Phrases: Heads, Complements and Subjects”, comprises eight chapters which cover the fundamental underlying principles of English phrase structure. The reader finds an introductory view of what it means to talk about phrase structure together with a cursory outline of a few basic types of English phrases (chapter 2). There follows a shift in attention towards showing the way in which head words dictate internal structure of their phrases (chapter 3). Chapter 4 surveys constructions which can serve not only as complements but also as subjects: that-clauses, infinitival clauses, wh- indirect question clauses. Detailed analyses of phrases appear in the next two chapters: first, a distinction is made between elementary and partitive (= of-) noun phrases (chapter 5); then locative phrases and motion phrases are closely examined along with the diverging grammatical status of particles vs. prepositions (chapter 6). The remaining chapters in this Part are devoted each to a different subject: chapter 7 deals with the analysis of what is known as free relative clauses; chapter 8 presents the reader with a wide, revised definition of subjects; and finally chapter 9 centers on the grammatical complexity of English passive constructions.

In his Part III, “The Syntax of Phrases: Modification”, Baker addresses some further issues concerning this time, phrasal modification. First, some constructions are fleshed out that are employed in English to provide both restrictive and nonrestrictive modification for nouns and noun phrases, including wh- and to-infinite relative clauses, that-clauses, and phrasal (= non-clausal) modifiers (chapter 10). Chapter 11 takes up the modification of verb phrases and sentences, and special attention is paid to the syntax of these modifiers, providing a sketchy account of their semantic effects. Lastly, the singularly rich and complex area of degree modification is discussed in chapter 12. It is at this point in the book that Baker explores how gradable adjectives, adverbs, quantifiers, nouns and even noun concepts can be grammatically modified with reference to a degree scale.

The remaining chapters of *English Syntax* deal with lesser issues which are loosely incorporated after the more substantially syntactic parts commented on above. Part IV, “Special Constructions”, contains an account of both existential and cleft constructions on the one hand (chapter 13), and on the other a scant inspection on English mood structures, namely questions, imperatives and exclamative sentences (chapter 14). In a different vein altogether, Part V emphasizes some semantic properties of English sentences: the role of negative words is examined in the syntax and semantics of the sentences in which they occur (chapter 15); some specific rules are given for ellipsis and coordination of both phrases and sentences (chapter 16); and both verbal and sentence aspect on the one hand, and the temporal interpretation of English sentences on the other are tackled in this last Part as well (chapter 17).


These two appendices are some of the most important changes in this 1995 edition. Baker is conscious that the material of the first 1989 edition could be augmented and reformulated for accessibility
purposes. Some other changes worth noting are the more insightful treatment given of the complement/adjunct distinction, the extensive and detailed use of tree diagrams to support syntactic argumentation, and the comprehensive coverage of the complex process of comparison in English language.

All in all, English Syntax makes a substantial contribution to the range of textbooks on English grammar available on the market. Anyone concerned with any aspect of the English language will surely be benefited from the attentive reading of this book. [FRANCISCO MARTIN MIGUEL, University of Corunna]