FOREWORD

There is great pleasure in writing well, and good writing begins with grammatical correctness. One can always flout rules but only when one knows what they are. Ignorant mistakes are rarely happy. Anyone who has learnt a natural language such as English will have a good understanding of its grammar but perhaps without being able to formulate and articulate it. That understanding is enlarged and deepened when it can be articulated. This book enables the reader to do that. Sophie Johnson has formulated and articulated the grammar of English sentences with insight and clarity which is just what a good grammar should manifest. She also uses very little technical vocabulary so there are no hurdles to understanding except thought itself.

Grammar is normative in that some sentence constructions are wrong and therefore unacceptable unless otherwise defensible. The burden of justification is on the writer. But grammar is also descriptive in that what counts as right or wrong is determined by usage in the relevant linguistic community of which there are many: different language games everywhere played. So there are both non-universal norms and the need for the exercise of judgement. Sophie Johnson balances these demands perfectly in developing three models of the well bred sentence. The pun is intentional. The well bred sentence is weed free, socially accomplished and well finished.

This is an excellent book on what is now a regrettably rare subject. It will be of great use to anyone studying the English language, or writing it in no matter what discipline, at either secondary or tertiary level, both within and without the university. It will improve, in particular, any course in English, any English as a second language course, and courses in creative writing. You may not always agree with what she says but you will always have to come to terms with it.

I am privileged and glad to commend it.

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INTRODUCTION

The mission of this work is to commend a method for describing the valid and invalid procedures of natural sentences. That method is based upon the proposal that there are only three models of the sentence, and only four styles of using them. This proposal contains no prescription. It is a neutral observation about how we make statements. The method uses Traditional Grammar (TG) terms selectively, engaging only those that are useful for describing the unit 'sentence', and for analysing instances of it. Exposition of TG terms is conventional, with one notable exception: the term 'clause' is eschewed on ground that it is at best a vacuous distinction, and at worst a saboteur in TG's own analytical scheme.

That 'clause' is a vacuous term is immediately apparent on this perspective: Two sentences make the same sense. The first has an adjective sequence that TG would call 'clause' because, it alleges, that adjective sequence contains the verb 'had instigated':

> He talked about the revolution *that he had instigated*.

The second has an adjective sequence that TG would call 'phrase' because it does not contain a verb

> He talked about the revolution *of his making*.

What, other than an accident of word choice, is the difference between these two adjective sequences? Their senses are alike to the point of being inter-changeable, and neither does anything more or less than describe 'revolution'. A description of how these sentences make sense gains exactly nothing with the distinction 'clause' and 'phrase'. It is therefore pointless and officious to make that distinction. More condemning criticism of TG's phrase/clause distinction is that the words it calls 'verbs' for the purpose of that distinction are not verbs at all: What verb function does 'had instigated' perform? That it performs none is the unavoidable conclusion, for reason alone that what it does do is take part in an adjective sequence that describes 'revolution'. In the light of TG's healthy contemporary practice of classifying words in parts-of-speech categories in accordance with their function in a sentence, it is surprising that it continues to tolerate the possibility of there being a verb in a sequence that does not have a verb's function. Tolerance of the clause/phrase distinction perpetuates the misconception that a complex sentence can contain more than one verb. In practice, the writer of a complex sentence who thinks he can allow more than one verb to be operative in it commits a procedural error that inevitably has him say something nonsensical. (See an example on pp. 9-10,

'Is there a sound verbial function?', in Chapter 3, 'The Complex Sentence'.)

Traditionally, but quite wrongly, the various 'clauses' expound TG's main clause/subordinate clauses' tenet. This hierarchy of clauses exists on two defective pieces of conceptualisation. The first defect is in the view that the 'subordinate clauses' of complex sentences contain verbs. They do not: They are noun, adjective, adverb or participle phrases that attach with descriptive, definitive or particularising intent to some part of the basic sentence. To do that is their function. The verb function is performed in the basic sentence to which they attach, and only there, because only a basic sentence has a subject and object or complement, so it alone is capable of containing the verb or copula or copular verb function. The tenet that there may be a verb element that does not perform a verb function (one that is not the determinant of the relationship between the subject and its object/complement) makes the TG concept 'verb' incomprehensible. The distinction main clause/subordinate clause has spawned this obtuse tenet.

The other defect in TG's `main clause/subordinate clause distinction is in that it does not acknowledge the different procedures of complex and compound sentences. Yet they are very different: The complex sentence is one basic sentence (TG calls it 'main clause') embedded by sequences (TG calls them 'subordinate clauses' and phrases) that extend the scope of its statement. Being a sentence, it has a subject and an object or complement. The sequences that embed it do not. For this reason those sequences are functionally and structurally quite unlike a sentence. TG's hierarchical main clause/subordinate clause tenet ignores the patently obvious fact that there can be no hierarchy of unlike elements.

The conjoined sentence (compound or composite) is a combination of several sentences regulated by compounding operators (conjunctives, disjunctives, *etc*.) for the purpose of making a statement. There are as many verb functions in it as there are sentences being joined. The particular framework of logic on which any set of sentences is joined is the one that serves its composer's statement-making intent. No sentence on this framework is more important than another. To call them 'main' and 'subordinate' is to wildly misrepresent the logical relationship that holds between them.

Another issue on which this book confronts TG is its traditional claim that a word or phrase that locates the place or the direction of the subject's activity by calling that place or direction 'an adverb of place'. It is not. Rather, is a locative noun, and the word that represents it is a locative pronoun. This is so for the perfectly simple

reason that a place or a direction has been *named*: the syntactic function that names is necessarily a noun. To call such nouns 'adverbs', as TG typically does, is not only to muddy the waters; it is to pollute them with nonsense.

No-one needs to be told how to compose a sentence. Composing one is the natural and unavoidable act of reasoning we perform whenever we want to say something. Albeit natural, this reasoning does not inevitably express itself as validly constructed sentences. Like any other sequence of reasoning, it can be invalid. This book provides the practical criteria for distinguishing the valid from the invalid procedures of sentence construction. The validity in question is not a creature of arbitrary rules. It is the procedural validity that achieves sense by avoiding ambiguity and no sense. Thus, when this book notes of a sentence-part that it is wrongly placed, the noting is done on the basis that the procedure for making sense, one sense, and the sense the writer seeks, has been wrongly implemented. Criteria of procedural validity are never stylistic considerations of the 'it sounds better' or 'ought to be' kind.

A statement, by nature, has a truth value: it says something that is either true or false. (The statement 'John arrived yesterday' is true if and only if John did arrive yesterday.) But, as every experienced reader knows, not all written or spoken sense is made as a statement. Naturally then, not all sequences of words that make sense are sentences in the 'statement' mode. Writers have made sense (constructed portraits, represented states of mind, tipped perspectives, *etc*.) outside the procedures of the statement-mode 'sentence'. Such 'literary' senses are personalist expressions to which neither truth conditions nor precepts of procedural validity can apply. It is, for instance, not useful to ask of:

> Altarwise by owl-
> light in the half-way
> house
> The gentleman lay
> graveward with his
> furies

whether it is true or false, nor whether its procedures are valid. Rather, we make sense of it in the private ways that our linguistic and aesthetic sensibilities render us capable. Concerned with the procedural validity that yields a true or false statement, this book does not examine 'sense' on this literary level.

The modes 'question', 'order' and 'exclamation' are related to the statement mode in that they raise a subject for a purpose. That purpose is not to say something about it, as the statement does, but to enquire or order or exclaim on the basis of it. These modes are

not subject to truth conditions for reason alone that they are these modes: 'John is here!' can be either true or false if it is used to exclaim that John is here. But the identical expression can also deride the suggestion that John is here: '*John* is *here*?' Derisive remark, like expostulation, is one-dimensional by nature: it does not have true-and-false facets. These modes have an a-syntactic element that is quite unlike the statement's. For instance, 'Door!' shouted at someone who has just walked through a door and failed to shut it raises the subject 'your shutting of the door' every bit as much as 'Shut the door, please!' or 'Would you shut the door?' raise it. That the latter is constructed and marked as a question, and the former as an exclamation, is immaterial: 'subject raised and order issued' is resplendent in both constructions.

No-one could mistake 'Would you shut the door?' for a question if it is uttered in the context described above. But nobody would mistake 'Would you swim in a crocodile-infested river?' for an order or a request. It is clearly an enquiry about the subject 'your swimming in a crocodile-infested river'. And both 'Swim in a crocodile-infested river!' and 'Swim in a crocodile-infested river?' are clearly exclamations (of disbelief, horror, protest, *etc*.), despite the question mark that punctuates one of them. Why one subject ('your shutting of the door') does not yield a question and another subject ('your swimming in this crocodile-infested river') does is something to do with the nature of the subject and the situation in which it is raised, and nothing much to do with syntax (procedural validity). Investigation of this interesting issue is beyond the scope of this book; its sole preoccupation is syntax.

Finally, I must confess that I coined the word 'verbials'. I find this convenient for referring collectively to the verb, copula and copular verb.

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