

Book Review: A Student's Introduction to English Grammar

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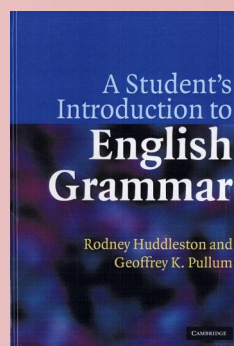
Authors: Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum

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A Student's Introduction to English Grammar by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum (2005) follows from the authors' earlier work *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002). It is an extensive overview of English grammar that takes a refreshingly descriptive view. According to the preface, *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar* is intended for those students who have little or no background in English grammar and 'presupposes no linguistics'. The book is divided into 16 chapters (see below), and each chapter is divided into subsections.

Each chapter lists the subheadings that will

1. Introduction
2. A rapid overview
3. Verbs, tenses, aspect, and mood
4. Clause structure, complements, and adjuncts
5. Nouns and noun phrases
6. Adjectives and adverbs
7. Prepositions and preposition phrases
8. Negation and related phenomena
9. Clause type: asking, exclaiming, and directing
10. Subordination and content clauses
11. Relative clauses
12. Grade and comparison
13. Non-finite clauses and clauses without verbs
14. Coordination and more
15. Information packaging in the clause
16. Morphology: words and lexemes

be covered in that chapter, which makes for a quick search for particular grammar items or information. Examples that are given for each topic are simple and easy to understand. The range of grammatical topics discussed is diverse and extensive and the chapters are, for the most part, logically subdivided from the biggest grammatical category to its constituent parts – from sentence level to word level (as in the case of Ch. 2) – or from constituent parts to clause level (comparative and superlative word form to comparative clauses in Ch. 12). At the end of each chapter, there are exercises reviewing the topics covered in that chapter.

For English as a Second Language (ESL)/English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students or students new to the study of grammar, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002) is generally more accessible than *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar* (2005). In *A Student's Introduction*, the authors make clear that common usage is the benchmark for what they consider grammatically appropriate; i.e. common usage is the standard as opposed to a formerly established grammar rule when the two are in disagreement. This is illustrated in their inclusion of a *Prescriptive Grammar Notes* section in each chapter, which is very helpful in clarifying appropriate grammar usages where there is some obfuscation between rules and

actual usage (e.g. the acceptance of the semantically singular **they**, p. 105). The end of the book features a very thorough glossary of terms and the further reading section, which helpfully contains recommendations for both general readers and linguistics students.

Probably the biggest disappointment for students in this book is that the end-of-chapter exercises have no answer key. This leaves students reliant on their teacher to double-check any of the exercises they have questions about. Having the exercises after each subtopic and example, instead of at the end of the chapter, might also make for an easier review since there are several subtopics covered in each chapter. Furthermore, students may find an imbalance between the extensive explanations and the relatively few exercises per topic, which could make working through the whole book somewhat tedious for very little reward (in this case, an opportunity for extended practice of any one part of grammar).

It is clear that because of the extensive explanations and technical vocabulary, a student or teacher needs native or near-native levels of competence in English to comprehend the book, which leads to questions as to its usefulness for second language learners. Although stated to be for students with no background in English grammar or linguistics, the terms and definitions are very technical and prolific, which seem to indicate that students should have more than a passing familiarity with some of the terms. For example, 'mood' is mentioned (pp. 41-42) before it is fully explained (p. 53). Furthermore, although the examples given are easy to understand, the explanations are exhaustive, which is useful for teachers and English/linguistics students; however, for English language learners, even with some knowledge of grammar, this can present difficulties in comprehension.

Those working in the field of World Englishes

might question the authors' understanding and application of the term **Standard English**: '...for the vast majority of questions about what's allowed in Standard English, the answers are clear' (p. 2). What is considered Standard English is far from clear. In their descriptive approach the authors acknowledge linguistic variation but it is limited to variations from native speakers. Additionally, the exercise section for Ch. 1 asks students to distinguish between standard and non-standard usage. Therefore, it is unclear how much of the grammar content and explanation took into consideration research in second language learning. The book also makes a judgment as to what is a standard and a non-standard variety of English (p. 156).

A Student's Introduction is an excellent reference for teachers or English/linguistics students but it is not very ESL/EAP-student friendly. Moreover, as there is no theory and no classroom application instructions, it will be most useful to teachers and advanced English students as a grammar reference guide. This book is well-designed and very thorough in its treatment of English grammar. Generally speaking however, *A Student's Guide* is more useful as a guide for teachers than students.



Layla Nichole Shelmerdine has an MA in Applied Linguistics and is currently teaching EAP in China. Her interests include language and power relations, and discourse analysis. She has extensive teaching experience in higher education in many different countries.

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