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[Aarts, Bas. Oxford modern English grammar]

Brno studies in English. 2012, vol. 38, iss. 1, pp. [179]-181

ISSN 0524-6881 (print); ISSN 1805-0867 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2012-1-12
Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/124312
Access Date: 17. 02. 2024
Version: 20220831

Brno Studies in English
Volume 38, No. 1, 2012
ISSN 0524-6881
DOI: 10.5817/BSE2012-1-12

Reviews

Bas Aarts: *Oxford Modern English Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-19-953319-0, xx + 410 pp.

Fifteen years after the posthumous publication of Sidney Greenbaum's *The Oxford English Grammar* (1996), Oxford University Press is coming up with a modern, innovative, but at the same time concise grammar, aimed similarly as its predecessor primarily at non-specialist (near)-native speakers of English and authored by Greenbaum's successor in charge of the Survey of English Usage at University College London – Bas Aarts.

Unlike Greenbaum's work, the scope of Aarts's grammar is restricted strictly to the morphological and syntactic levels, excluding phonological and orthographic issues. In this sense, it is a prototypical piece of grammar dealing with, to put it in simple terms, the structure of word forms and how these forms are combined into clauses. The word-formative aspect, which is considered to be a part of morphology, is also included. The example sentences used as illustrations are all excerpted from the British portion of the ICE corpus. In a small number of cases, Aarts introduces minor modifications to the example sentences in order to better illustrate particular grammatical phenomena. A valuable feature of the grammar is that it does not make use of the corpus just to excerpt examples, but also on occasion mentions frequency rates of selected linguistic units. Very exceptionally, a few notes on historical background of the present-day situation are included. As noted in the preface, the analytical framework of the grammar relies heavily on other reference grammars, especially Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum's *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002), two of the most comprehensive descriptions of the English language ever written. However, Aarts has not followed the grammatical analyses presented in these two works in all cases and suggests several innovations. The book is organized into four main parts which are further subdivided into twelve chapters.

Part I begins with a brief overview of the history of English grammar writing, mentioning a small number of the most influential English grammars by Bullokar, Murray, Priestley and Jespersen, and provides readers with a basic classification of grammars into school grammars, pedagogical grammars, traditional grammars and theoretical grammars. Although Aarts acknowledges an influence of theoretical grammars upon his own work, he classifies his grammar as a descriptive reference grammar. As a result, the author does not worry too much about prescriptive issues and he himself states that "readers hoping to find confirmation that the so-called split infinitive is an odious manifestation of the decline of the English language - to give but one example of a common usage shibboleth – will be disappointed" (Aarts 2011: xv). In the succeeding lines, Part I introduces elementary grammatical notions such as those of word class, phrase, subject and predicate and differentiates between grammatical functions (Subject, Object etc.) versus semantic roles (Agent, Patient etc.). These notions serve just as a basic introduction to the topic and all of them are further elaborated in their respective sections. After the introductory Part I, Parts II and III represent the

central morphological and syntactic sections of the grammar. Part II, containing Chapters 2, 3 and 4, gives an account of the internal structure of words and their formation, describes particular parts of speech and introduces grammatical functions and semantic roles as they are used in the study of syntax and semantics of English clauses. As far as parts of speech are concerned, the grammar owes much to Huddleston and Pullum's approach. For example, as in Huddleston and Pullum's 2002 grammar, pronouns are not classified as a separate class but as a subclass of nouns. This is syntactically justified since pronouns typically occur in noun phrase position and function as heads of noun phrases; nevertheless, non-specialist readers acquainted with basics of more traditional school grammar might be reluctant to accept this approach. Secondly, items expressing temporal deixis like *today*, *tomorrow* etc., which are classified as adverbs in Quirk et al. (1985), are considered temporal pronouns in Aarts's grammar and, consequently, a subclass of nouns. A shift from the traditional grammar can also be observed in the treatment of prepositions, which are identified as either transitive or intransitive based on syntactic criteria. This means that prepositions need not necessarily be followed by their respective complements and can stand alone, an occurrence which would be classified as an adverb in Quirk et al. (1985). But the scope of the class of prepositions extends not only to adverbs of the traditional grammar but also includes subordinating conjunctions. Aarts recognizes only three (*that*, *whether*, *if*) subordinating conjunctions for finite subordinate clauses and one (*for*) for non-finite clauses. Items such as *since*, *before*, *although*, *because* are not included under subordinators and are treated as prepositions. Last but not least, numerals are not recognized as a separate word class. Instead, they are classified either as determiners (cardinal numerals of the traditional grammar) or adjectives (ordinal numerals of the traditional grammar). On the other hand, in contrast to Huddleston and Pullum, Aarts does not classify coordinators and subordinators as two separate word classes, but accepts the traditional label 'conjunction' for both these groups. On the syntactic level, the term 'grammatical role' rather than the traditional 'clause element' is used for strings of words that behave as phrases and play a particular role in a clause. Within grammatical roles, Aarts distinguishes Subjects, Predicators, Complements and Adjuncts. It must be noted that the general term Complement is not restricted to Subject-related and Object-related Predicative Complements as in Quirk et al. (1985), but covers Direct Objects, Indirect Objects, certain prepositional phrases and Complement Clauses. As far as the terms Subject-related Predicative Complement and Object-related Predicative Complement are concerned, keeping in mind the purpose of the grammar, it would have probably been more suitable to operate with Quirk et al.'s (1985) simpler terms Subject Complement and Object Complement. On the other hand, by using these complex terms Aarts leaves the term Complement free to be applied to all types of complementation as has long been customary in more theoretically oriented approaches.

Part III focuses on the phrasal and clausal levels. Descriptions of individual grammatical elements cover their internal structure, distributional properties and semantic characteristics. On the phrase level, complex noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases and adverb phrases are examined in Chapter 5, which includes a detailed description of their skeletal structure. Aarts distinguishes the following functions within phrases: Head, Complement and Adjunct. Additionally, Determiner and Predeterminer are only recognized within noun phrases. All phrases are regarded as necessarily endocentric, i.e. they must be headed. This approach differs from that of Quirk et al. (1985), where prepositional phrases and verb phrases are not properly headed. In general terms, then, one can claim that Aarts largely follows Huddleston and Pullum's 2002 account of phrase structure, though there are certain differences between the two analyses. For example, for Huddleston and Pullum, there are two types of external modifiers for noun phrases: predeterminer modifiers (i.e. predeterminers) and peripheral modifiers. Aarts also uses the function label Predeterminer, but he uses the label External Adjunct instead of peripheral modifier. Moreover, Aarts's analysis is different from both Huddleston and Pullum's (2002) and Quirk et al.'s (1985) in that he does not use the traditional term Modifier for an item standing before as well as after the Head. Instead, he uses the term Adjunct which becomes polyfunctional in his grammar. In traditional grammars, the term Adjunct is restricted to a special subclass of Adverbial, i.e. a grammatical role fully integrated in the structure of the clause which can either modify Predicator with a new piece of information or expresses general background information for the whole clause. Aarts uses the term Adjunct for both the grammatical role as well

as the grammatical function at phrase level. Here, Aarts distinguishes between Pre-Head Adjuncts and Post-Head Adjuncts. A negative aspect of this usage is that there are simply too many Adjuncts of different nature in the grammar and a non-specialist, on whom the book is primarily focussed, might become confused. Chapter 6 takes the reader to a discussion of particular declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative clause types and negation. As opposed to Quirk et al. (1985), the largest unit of grammatical description used in Aarts's grammar is the clause, not the sentence. These are further differentiated into main clauses and subordinate clauses. Chapters 7 and 8 are devoted to a detailed account of subordinate clauses which are divided in accordance with Huddleston and Pullum (2002) into two main types – finite and non-finite. Although 'finiteness' is traditionally concerned with variation for person and number and is applied to verbs, Aarts claims that it is wiser to speak of finiteness as a property of clauses since verbal paradigms contain minimum distinct endings. Moreover, he distinguishes between the terms 'finite' and 'tensed', not considering them as synonyms. Aarts argues that any clause that is tensed is also finite, nevertheless, not all finite clauses are tensed. Subjunctive and imperative clauses are exceptions to this rule. As for the typology of subordinate clauses, Aarts largely follows Huddleston and Pullum's distinction whereby non-finite subordinate clauses are divided into four basic types (*to*-infinitive clauses, bare infinitive clauses, *-ing* participle clauses and past participle clauses) and finite subordinate clauses into three main types (content clauses, comparative clauses and relative clauses). In other grammars (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985), 'content clauses' are called 'nominal clauses' though these also comprise non-finite structures.

The concluding section discusses semantic aspects of grammar. These are divided into discussions of tense and aspect in Chapter 9, mood in Chapter 10 and information structuring in Chapter 11. Some grammars, e.g. Huddleston and Pullum (2002), regard the perfect as a (secondary) tense rather than as an aspectual construction. Aarts, similarly to Quirk et al. (1985), regards perfect constructions in general as being aspectual. In addition, he does not consider only perfective and progressive constructions as aspectual, but distinguishes also so-called 'aspectual lexical verbs'. As far as modality is concerned, Aarts, similarly as Huddleston and Pullum (2002), distinguishes three types of modality (deontic, epistemic and dynamic). Unlike many other grammars, he does not differentiate between particular types of the subjunctive mood, arguing that the only true remnant of subjunctive in English is the verb *to be*, which has the past subjunctive form *were* for the 1st and 3rd person singular. Similarly as in the case of aspectuality, Aarts claims that modality can also be expressed lexically by means of modal nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.

Part IV is followed by two appendices (dealing with irregular verbs and the structure of the ICE-GB corpus), notes on further reading, a list of the ICE-GB sources of the examples quoted in the text, references, and an index divided into a subject index and a lexical index.

All in all, the grammar covers more than 400 pages and offers the non-specialist reader an easily accessible source of information about a wide range of aspects of the English language. As has sufficiently been made clear, Aarts's volume is a very valuable reference grammar for anyone who seeks a succinct guide to how English grammar works and how it can be described in an academic, yet reader-friendly manner.

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