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LOGICALLY STRUCTURED ENGLISH GRAMMAR

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BRIEF HISTORY

FOREWORD

WHAT IS NEW IN THIRD EDITION

ABBREVIATIONS

CREDITS

INTRODUCTION

I1: PHONETICS

I2: MORPHOLOGY

I3: SYNTAX

I4: PUNCTUATION

I5: ABOUT ENGLISH GRAMMAR

PART 1: PHONETICS

ENGLISH PHONETICS

PH1: ENGLISH SOUNDS

PH2: VOWELS

PH3: SEMI-VOWELS

PH4: CONSONANTS

PH5: DIPHTHONGS AND TRIPHTHONGS

PH6: PRONOUNCING FOREIGN AND UNKNOWN WORDS

PART 2: MORPHOLOGY

M1: NOUNS

M1.1 CATEGORIES OF NOUNS

M1.2 THE NUMBER OF THE NOUN

M1.3 THE GENDER OF THE NOUN

M1.3.1 The Gender of Common Nouns

M1.3.2 The Gender of Proper Nouns

M1.3.3 Expressing Nouns' Gender Analytically

M1.3.4 Expressing Nouns' Gender using Personifications

M1.4 THE CASE OF THE NOUN

M1.4.1 Nominative

M1.4.2 Dative

M1.4.3 Accusative

M1.5 GENITIVE

M1.5.1 Synthetic Genitive

M1.5.2 Analytic Genitive

M1.6 NOUN DECLENSION AND SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS

M1.7 FORMING NOUNS AND EQUIVALENT NOUNS

M1.7.1 Forming Nouns Using Derivation

M1.7.2 Forming Nouns and Equivalent Nouns Using Composition

M1.7.3 Forming Nouns Using Grammar Category Conversion

M2: ARTICLES

M2.1 READING ARTICLES

M2.2 NOUNS TAKING NO ARTICLE

M2.3 INDEFINITE ARTICLE

5

15

18

20

21

23

25

27

28

29

31

31

37

37

39

40

40

41

42

47

49

54

60

61

63

64

65

66

68

70

73

75

77

80

83

86

86

88

89

91

93

94

96

M2.4 DEFINITE ARTICLE**M2.5 IMPLICITLY PRESENT OR MISSING ARTICLE**

99

101

M3: ADJECTIVES**103****M3.1 QUALIFYING ADJECTIVES**

105

M3.1.1 Qualifying Adjectives Working as Common Attributes

108

M3.1.2 Qualifying Adjectives Working as Subject Complements

109

M3.1.3 Qualifying Adjectives Working as Object Complements

111

M3.2 DETERMINING ADJECTIVES

112

M3.2.1 Possessive Adjectives

112

M3.2.2 Demonstrative Adjectives

114

M3.2.3 Interrogative Adjectives

115

M3.2.4 Relative Adjectives

117

M3.2.5 Indefinite Adjectives

118

M3.3 COMPARING ADJECTIVES

120

M3.3.1 Qualifying Adjectives: Superiority Comparison

121

M3.3.2 Qualifying Adjectives: Equality Comparison

126

M3.3.3 Qualifying Adjectives: Inferiority Comparison

126

M3.4 QUALIFYING ADJECTIVES IN COMPARATIVE COMPLEX SENTENCES

128

M3.5 FORMING ADJECTIVES

131

M3.5.1 Forming Adjectives Using Derivation

131

M3.5.2 Forming Adjectives Using Composition

132

M3.5.3 Forming Adjectives Using Grammar Category Conversion

133

M3.6 PARTICULAR ADJECTIVES

134

M3.6.1 Particular Adjectives: "much", "many", "long"

134

M3.6.2 Particular Adjectives: "little", "small", "few"

135

M3.6.3 Particular Adjectives: "first", "fore", "former"

137

M3.6.4 Particular Adjectives: "last", "near", "next"

137

M3.6.5 Particular Adjectives: "farther", "further"

138

M3.6.6 Particular Adjectives: "out", "utter"

139

M3.6.7 Particular Adjectives: "older", "elder"

140

M3.6.8 Particular Adjectives: "each", "every"

140

M3.6.9 Particular Adjectives: "all", "one"

141

M3.6.10 Particular Adjectives: "some", "any", "no", "none"

142

M3.6.11 Particular Adjectives: "this", "that", "these", "those"

143

M4: PRONOUNS**146****M4.1 PERSONAL PRONOUNS**

148

M4.2 POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

156

M4.3 REFLEXIVE AND EMPHATIC PRONOUNS

159

M4.4 DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

163

M4.4.1 Demonstrative Pronouns: "this", "that", "these", "those"

164

M4.4.2 Demonstrative Pronouns: "first", "last"

166

M4.4.3 Demonstrative Pronouns: "former", "latter"

167

M4.4.4 Demonstrative Pronouns: "other", "others"

168

M4.4.5 Demonstrative Pronouns: "one", "ones"

168

M4.4.6 Demonstrative Pronouns: "same", "such", "so"

169

M4.5 INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

171

M4.6 RELATIVE PRONOUNS

175

M4.6.1 Relative Pronouns: "who", "which", "what"

177

M4.6.2 Relative Pronouns: "that"

178

M4.6.3 Relative Pronouns: "as"

179

M4.6.4 Relative Pronouns: "but"

180

M4.7 RECIPROCAL PRONOUNS

181

M4.8 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

182

M4.8.1 Indefinite Pronouns: "all", "whole", "one"

182

M4.8.2 Indefinite Pronouns: "some"

183

M4.8.3 Indefinite Pronouns: "any"

184

M4.8.4 Indefinite Pronouns: "none", "no"

185

M4.8.5 Indefinite Pronouns: "either", "neither"

186

M4.8.6 Indefinite Pronouns: "other", "others"	186
M4.8.7 Indefinite Pronouns: "each", "every"	187
M4.8.8 Indefinite Pronouns: "both", "certain", "several"	188
M4.8.9 Indefinite Pronouns: Impersonal "you", "he", "it", "we", "they"	189
M5: NUMERALS	191
M5.1 CARDINAL NUMERALS	194
M5.2 ORDINAL NUMERALS	198
M5.3 FRACTIONAL NUMERALS	200
M5.3.1 Common Fraction	200
M5.3.2 Decimal Numbers	201
M5.4 COLLECTIVE NUMERALS	202
M5.5 MULTIPLICATIVE NUMERALS	203
M5.6 DISTRIBUTIVE NUMERALS	204
M5.7 ADVERBIAL NUMERALS	205
M5.8 INDEFINITE NUMERALS	206
M5.9 WORKING WITH NUMERALS	208
M5.9.1 Types of Numbers	208
M5.9.2 Addition and Subtraction	209
M5.9.3 Multiplication, Division, Exponentiation	209
M5.9.4 Idiomatic Numeral Expressions	210
M5.10 TECHNICAL NUMERALS	212
M5.11 ROMAN NUMERALS	215
M5.12 THE SYMBOLS OF THE LATIN ALPHABET	216
M6: VERBS	217
M6.1 CATEGORIES OF VERBS	219
M6.1.1 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs	220
M6.1.2 The Aspect of the Verb	221
M6.1.3 The Voice of the Verb	223
M6.1.4 The Number of the Verb	225
M6.1.5 The Person of the Verb	226
M6.1.6 The Mood of the Verb	227
M6.1.7 The Tense of the Verb	228
M6.1.8 Principal, Auxiliary, and Modal Defective Verbs	230
M6.1.9 Regular and Irregular Verbs	231
M6.2 VERB FORMS CHARTS	232
M6.2.1 Verb Forms Chart: Common Aspect, Active Voice	233
M6.2.2 Verb Forms Chart: Common Aspect, Passive Voice	234
M6.2.3 Verb Forms Chart: Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	235
M6.2.4 Verb Forms Chart: Continuous Aspect, Passive Voice	236
M6.3 PERSONAL MOODS	237
M6.3.1 Indicative: Present	239
M6.3.1.1 Present Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	239
M6.3.1.2 Present Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	241
M6.3.1.3 Present Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	242
M6.3.1.4 Present Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Passive Voice	242
M6.3.2 Indicative: Past	244
M6.3.2.1 Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	244
M6.3.2.2 Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	246
M6.3.2.3 Past Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	247
M6.3.2.4 Past Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Passive Voice	248
M6.3.3 Indicative: Future	249
M6.3.3.1 Future Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	249
M6.3.3.2 Future Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	251
M6.3.3.3 Future Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	252
M6.3.4 Indicative: Future in the Past	253
M6.3.4.1 Future in the Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	253
M6.3.4.2 Future in the Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	255
M6.3.4.3 Future in the Past Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	255

M6.3.5 Indicative: Present Perfect	257
M6.3.5.1 Present Perfect Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	257
M6.3.5.2 Present Perfect Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	259
M6.3.5.3 Present Perfect Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	260
M6.3.6 Indicative: Past Perfect	261
M6.3.6.1 Past Perfect Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	261
M6.3.6.2 Past Perfect Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	262
M6.3.6.3 Past Perfect Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	263
M6.3.7 Indicative: Future Perfect	264
M6.3.7.1 Future Perfect Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	264
M6.3.7.2 Future Perfect Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	265
M6.3.7.3 Future Perfect Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	266
M6.3.8 Indicative: Future Perfect in the Past	267
M6.3.8.1 Future Perfect in the Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	267
M6.3.8.2 Future Perfect in the Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	268
M6.3.8.3 Future Perfect in the Past Indicative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	269
M6.3.9 Subjunctive: Present	270
M6.3.9.1 Present Subjunctive, Common Aspect, Active Voice	270
M6.3.9.2 Present Subjunctive, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	273
M6.3.9.3 Present Subjunctive, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	273
M6.3.9.4 Present Subjunctive, Continuous Aspect, Passive Voice	274
M6.3.10 Subjunctive: Perfect	275
M6.3.10.1 Perfect Subjunctive, Common Aspect, Active Voice	275
M6.3.10.2 Perfect Subjunctive, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	277
M6.3.10.3 Perfect Subjunctive, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	277
M6.3.11 Old-Form Subjunctive and Equivalent Subjunctives	279
M6.3.12 Conditional: Present	282
M6.3.12.1 Present Conditional, Common Aspect, Active Voice	283
M6.3.12.2 Present Conditional, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	284
M6.3.12.3 Present Conditional, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	284
M6.3.12.4 Equivalent Present Conditionals	285
M6.3.13 Conditional: Perfect	287
M6.3.13.1 Perfect Conditional, Common Aspect, Active Voice	287
M6.3.13.2 Perfect Conditional, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	288
M6.3.13.3 Perfect Conditional, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	289
M6.3.13.4 Equivalent Perfect Conditionals	289
M6.3.14 Imperative: Present	291
M6.3.14.1 Present Imperative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	291
M6.3.14.2 Present Imperative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	292
M6.3.14.3 Present Imperative, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	292
M6.3.15 Common Contractions	294
M6.4 IMPERSONAL MOODS	297
M6.4.1 Infinitive: Present	298
M6.4.1.1 Present Infinitive, Common Aspect, Active Voice	298
M6.4.1.2 Present Infinitive, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	302
M6.4.1.3 Present Infinitive, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	302
M6.4.2 Infinitive: Perfect	303
M6.4.2.1 Perfect Infinitive, Common Aspect, Active Voice	303
M6.4.2.2 Perfect Infinitive, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	303
M6.4.2.3 Perfect Infinitive, Continuous Aspect, Active Voice	304
M6.4.3 Participle: Present	305
M6.4.3.1 Present Participle, Common Aspect, Active Voice	305
M6.4.3.2 Present Participle, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	307
M6.4.3.3 The "ing" Form	307
M6.4.4 Participle: Past	309
M6.4.4.1 Past Participle, Common Aspect, Active Voice	309
M6.4.4.2 Past Participle, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	311
M6.4.5 Participle: Perfect	312
M6.4.5.1 Perfect Participle, Common Aspect, Active Voice	312
M6.4.5.2 Perfect Participle, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	313
M6.4.6 Gerund: Present	314
M6.4.6.1 Present Gerund, Common Aspect, Active Voice	314
M6.4.6.2 Present Gerund, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	316

M6.4.6.3 Differentiating Present Gerund and Present Participle	316
M6.4.7 Gerund: Perfect	318
M6.4.7.1 Perfect Gerund, Common Aspect, Active Voice	318
M6.4.7.2 Perfect Gerund, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	319
M6.5 IRREGULAR VERBS	320
M6.5.1 Irregular Verbs List	322
M6.5.2 Difficult Verbs	328
M6.6 AUXILIARY VERBS	332
M6.6.1 Auxiliary Verbs: "to be"	335
M6.6.1.1 Verb Forms Charts: "to be"	335
M6.6.1.2 Using "to be"	336
M6.6.2 Auxiliary Verbs: "to have"	339
M6.6.2.1 Verb Forms Charts: "to have"	339
M6.6.2.2 Using "to have"	340
M6.6.3 Auxiliary Verbs: "to do"	343
M6.6.4 Auxiliary Verbs: "to let"	345
M6.7 MODAL DEFECTIVE VERBS	347
M6.7.1 Modal Defective Verbs: Characteristics	349
M6.7.1.1 Modal Defective Verbs: Conjugations	350
M6.7.1.2 Modal Defective Verbs: General Characteristics	350
M6.7.2 Modal Defective Verbs: "shall", "should"	353
M6.7.3 Modal Defective Verbs: "will", "would"	356
M6.7.4 Modal Defective Verbs: "can", "could"	359
M6.7.5 Modal Defective Verbs: "may", "might"	361
M6.7.6 Modal Defective Verbs: "must", "ought to"	364
M6.7.6.1 Modal Defective "must"	364
M6.7.6.2 Modal Defective "ought to"	365
M6.7.7 Other Auxiliary and Modal Defective Verbs	367
M6.7.7.1 Semi-Modal Defective Verbs	367
M6.7.7.2 Semi-Auxiliary Verbs	368
M6.7.7.3 Near Future Indicative: Arguments Pro and Contra	370
M6.7.8 Indicative: Near Future	372
M6.7.8.1 Near Future Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	372
M6.7.8.2 Near Future Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	373
M6.7.9 Indicative: Near Future in the Past	374
M6.7.9.1 Near Future in the Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Active Voice	374
M6.7.9.2 Near Future in the Past Indicative, Common Aspect, Passive Voice	375
M6.8 FORMING VERBS	376
M6.8.1 Forming Verbs Using Derivation	376
M6.8.2 Forming Verbs Using Grammar Category Conversion	377
M6.8.3 Forming Verbs Using "Compounding Words" Method	378
M6.8.4 Forming Complex Verbs	378
M6.8.5 Forming Equivalent Verbs	379
M6.8.6 Onomatopoeic Verbs	379
M7: ADVERBS	380
M7.1 CATEGORIES OF ADVERBS	383
M7.2 VERBS WITH ADVERBIAL PARTICLE	385
M7.2.1 Adverbial Particle	385
M7.2.2 Verbs with Adverbial Particle	386
M7.3 QUALIFYING ADVERBS OF MANNER	388
M7.3.1 Adverbs of Manner	389
M7.3.2 Adverbs of Quality	390
M7.3.3 Intensifier Adverbs	393
M7.3.4 Adverbs of Affirmation, Negation, and Probability	394
M7.3.5 Adverbs of Restriction	395
M7.3.6 Explanatory Adverbs	396
M7.3.7 Adverbs of Quantity, Amount, Degree	396
M7.3.8 Introductory Adverbs	397
M7.4 ADVERBS OF TIME, PLACE, CAUSE, AND DETERMINING	399
M7.4.1 Adverbs of Place	400
M7.4.2 Adverbs of Time	400

M7.4.3 Adverbs of Cause, Reason, Result

M7.4.4 Determining Adverbs

M7.5 PARTICULAR ADVERBS

M7.5.1 Adverbs and Predicative Adjectives

M7.5.2 Adverbs, Adjectives, and Nouns Having Identical Forms

M7.5.3 Adverbs Having Two Forms

M7.5.4 Particular Adverbs: "but", "still", "yet"

M7.5.5 Particular Adverbs: "very"

M7.5.6 Particular Adverbs: "the", "there", "too"

M7.5.7 Particular Adverbs: "hardly ... when", "no sooner ... than", "just now"

M7.5.8 Particular Adverbs: "ago", "since", "before", "besides"

M7.6 COMPARING ADVERBS**M7.7 POSITIONING ADVERBS**

M7.7.1 Positioning Adverbs of Manner

M7.7.2 Positioning Adverbs of Time

M7.7.3 Positioning Adverbs of Place

M7.7.4 Positioning Other Categories of Adverbs

M7.7.5 Split Infinitive

M7.7.6 Positioning Many Adverbs

M7.7.7 Positioning a few Particular Adverbs

M7.8 FORMING ADVERBS

M7.8.1 Forming Derivative Adverbs

M7.8.2 Forming Compound Adverbs

M8: PREPOSITIONS

M8.1 COMPARING PREPOSITIONS, CONJUNCTIONS, ADVERBS

M8.2 TYPES OF PREPOSITIONS

M8.2.1 Types of Prepositions

M8.2.2 Placing Prepositions

M8.3 VERBS WITH PREPOSITION**M8.4 VERBS WITH ADVERBIAL PARTICLE AND PREPOSITION****M8.5 USING PREPOSITIONS****M9: CONJUNCTIONS**

M9.1 TYPES OF CONJUNCTIONS

M9.2 SENTENCE ELEMENTS WORKING AS EQUIVALENT CONJUNCTIONS

M9.3 PARTICULAR CONJUNCTIONS: "LIKE", "AS", "TILL", "THAT", "IF", "WHETHER"

M10: INTERJECTIONS**PART 3: SYNTAX****S1: SENTENCE SYNTAX**

S1.1 TYPES OF SENTENCES

S1.2 SUBJECT

S1.3 PREDICATE

S1.3.1 Verbal Predicate

S1.3.2 Nominal Predicate: Copula

S1.3.3 Nominal Predicate: Predicate Complement

S1.3.4 Nominal Predicate: Appositive Predicate

S1.3.5 Complete Predicate: Predicate of Result

S1.4 SUBJECT-PREDICATE AGREEMENT

S1.4.1 Subjects Taking Predicates in Either Singular or Plural Form

S1.4.2 Plural Subjects Taking Predicates in Singular Form

S1.4.3 Singular Subjects Taking Predicates in Plural Form

S1.4.4 Compound Subjects Predicate Agreement

S1.5 ATTRIBUTES

S1.5.1 Using Attributes

S1.5.2 Positioning Common Attributes

401

402

404

404

405

406

406

407

408

409

410

412

417

417

419

421

421

423

423

424

426

426

427

429

431

433

433

434

436

438

439

444

446

452

453

455**461**

463

468

474

476

477

479

482

483

485

485

486

487

487

490

491

492

S1.5.3 Subject Complement Attributes	495
S1.5.4 Object Complement Attributes	496
S1.5.5 Appositions	497
S1.6 DIRECT OBJECT	499
S1.6.1 Direct Object	499
S1.6.2 The Cognate Object	501
S1.6.3 Verbs with Two Direct Objects	502
S1.7 INDIRECT OBJECT	503
S1.7.1 Indirect Object	503
S1.7.2 Indirect Object without Preposition	504
S1.7.3 Indirect Object with Preposition	504
S1.7.4 Predicates Taking both Direct and Indirect Objects	506
S1.7.5 Retained Object	507
S1.8 PREPOSITIONAL OBJECT	509
S1.8.1 Prepositional Object	509
S1.8.2 Comparison: Prepositional Object versus Prepositional Adverbial	510
S1.8.3 Identical Prepositional Object and Prepositional Adverbial	511
S1.8.4 Using Prepositional Object	511
S1.8.5 Complex Object	512
S1.9 ADVERBIALS	513
S1.9.1 Adverbials of Manner	514
S1.9.2 Adverbials of Time	515
S1.9.3 Adverbials of Place and Momentum	517
S1.9.4 Adverbials of Cause	518
S1.9.5 Adverbials of Purpose or Result	519
S1.9.6 Adverbials of Condition or Supposition	520
S1.9.7 Adverbials of Concession	521
S1.9.8 Compound Adverbials	522
S1.10 STRUCTURING SENTENCES	523
S1.10.1 General Sentence Structure	523
S1.10.2 Accentuation	523
S1.10.3 Resonance and Rhythm	524
S1.10.4 Natural Declarative Sentence Structure	524
S1.10.5 Natural Interrogative Sentence Structure	525
S1.10.6 The Subject-Predicate Order	526
S1.10.7 The Order of Multiple Attributes	528
S2: COMPLEX SENTENCE SYNTAX	530
S2.1 ANALOGY TO MORPHOLOGY	534
S2.1.1 Noun Subordinate Clauses	535
S2.1.2 Adjective Subordinate Clauses	537
S2.1.3 Adverb Subordinate Clauses	539
S2.1.3.1 Adverbial of Manner and Comparison Clause	539
S2.1.3.2 Adverbial of Time Clause	540
S2.1.3.3 Adverbial of Place Clause	541
S2.1.3.4 Adverbial of Cause Clause	542
S2.1.3.5 Adverbial of Purpose Clause	542
S2.1.3.6 Adverbial of Result or Consecutive Clause	542
S2.1.3.7 Adverbial of Concession Clause	543
S2.1.3.8 Relative Clauses	544
S2.1.3.9 Adverbial of Condition Clause	548
S2.2 CONDITIONAL COMPLEX SENTENCE	550
S2.2.1 Conditional Clause: Real Action Verbs	551
S2.2.2 Conditional Clause: Unreal Action Verbs	553
S2.2.3 Tenses in Conditional Complex Sentence for Unreal Action Verbs	556
S2.2.4 Reduced Conditional Complex Sentence	557
S2.2.5 Reversing the Order in Conditional Complex Sentence	557
S2.2.6 Extended Conditional Complex Sentence	558
S2.3 ANALOGY TO SENTENCE SYNTAX	559
S2.3.1 Subjective Clauses	559
S2.3.2 Predicative Clauses	560
S2.3.3 Attributive Clauses	561

- S2.3.4 Objective Clauses
- S2.3.5 Prepositional Clauses
- S2.3.6 Adverbial Clauses

S2.4 COMPLEX SENTENCE SYNTAX ANALYSIS

- S2.4.1 Complex Sentence Syntax Analysis
- S2.4.2 Double/Compound Sentence Syntax Analysis
- S2.4.3 Multiple Sentence Syntax Analysis

S3: THE SEQUENCE OF TENSES

- S3.1 THE SEQUENCE OF TENSES: RULES
- S3.2 EXCEPTIONS TO RULE 3
- S3.3 ADDITIONAL EXCEPTIONS TO THE SEQUENCE OF TENSES RULES

S4: DIRECT AND INDIRECT STYLE

- S4.1 TRANSFORMING DIRECT STYLE TO INDIRECT STYLE: GENERAL RULES
- S4.2 INTERROGATIVE, EMPHATIC, AND IMPERATIVE SENTENCES IN INDIRECT STYLE
 - S4.2.1 Transforming Interrogative Sentences to Indirect Style
 - S4.2.2 Transforming Emphatic Sentences to Indirect Style
 - S4.2.3 Transforming Imperative Sentences to Indirect Style

S5: INTERROGATIONS AND NEGATIONS

S5.1 INTERROGATIONS

- S5.1.1 Interrogations with "to be"
- S5.1.2 Interrogations with "to have"
- S5.1.3 Interrogations with Modal Defective Verbs
- S5.1.4 Interrogations with "All Other Verbs" Group
- S5.1.5 Confirmative Question
- S5.1.6 Rhetorical Question
- S5.1.7 Other Forms of Interrogations

S5.2 NEGATIONS

- S5.2.1 Negations with "to be"
- S5.2.2 Negations with "to have"
- S5.2.3 Negations with Modal Defective Verbs
- S5.2.4 Negations with "All Other Verbs" Group
- S5.2.5 Negative Interrogations
- S5.2.6 Double Negation

- S5.3 "SOME", "ANY", "NO" IN AFFIRMATIONS, INTERROGATIONS, NEGATIONS
- S5.4 USING SHORT ANSWER

PART 4: PUNCTUATION

ENGLISH PUNCTUATION

P1: PERIOD

P2: QUOTES

P3: COMMA

- P3.1 USING COMMA IN COMPLEX SENTENCES
- P3.2 MARKING SUBORDINATE CLAUSES
- P3.3 ISOLATING APPPOSITIONS AND NOMINATIVE OF ADDRESS
- P3.4 SEPARATING MULTIPLE ATTRIBUTES
- P3.5 USING COMMA IN SERIES
- P3.6 USING COMMA IN VERTICAL LISTS
- P3.7 USING COMMA IN INTERJECTIONS AND ELLIPTIC CONSTRUCTIONS
- P3.8 USING COMMA TO INTRODUCE DIRECT STYLE
- P3.9 USING COMMA TO AVOID AMBIGUITY
- P3.10 MAIN MISTAKES IN COMMA USE

P4: SEMICOLON

P5: COLON

562
562
563
564
565
566
567
570
570
571
573
574
575
580
580
581
581
583
583
583
584
585
585
586
586
587
588
588
588
589
590
591
591
593
595
601
604
607
610
610
611
614
614
615
616
617
618
619
619
621
622

P6: EXCLAMATION POINT AND QUESTION MARK

P6.1 USING THE EXCLAMATION POINT

P6.2 USING THE QUESTION MARK

P7: HYPHEN AND DASHES

P7.1 HYPHEN

P7.2 USING THE "EN" DASH

P7.3 USING THE "EM" DASH

P8: SOLIDUS AND POINTS OF ELLIPSIS

P8.1 USING SOLIDUS

P8.2 USING POINTS OF ELLIPSIS

P9: BRACKETS AND PARENTHESES

P9.1 ANGLE BRACKETS

P9.2 BRACES

P9.3 SQUARE BRACKETS

P9.4 PARENTHESES

P10: APOSTROPHE

P10.1 USING THE APOSTROPHE IN SYNTHETIC GENITIVE

P10.2 FORMING CUSTOM PLURALS WITHOUT APOSTROPHE

P10.3 FORMING CUSTOM ADJECTIVES

P10.4 MARKING PHONETIC OMISSIONS

FINAL WORD

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PUBLICATIONS CONSULTED

INTERNET REFERENCES

624

624

625

626

626

627

627

630

630

631

632

632

632

632

633

634

634

634

635

635

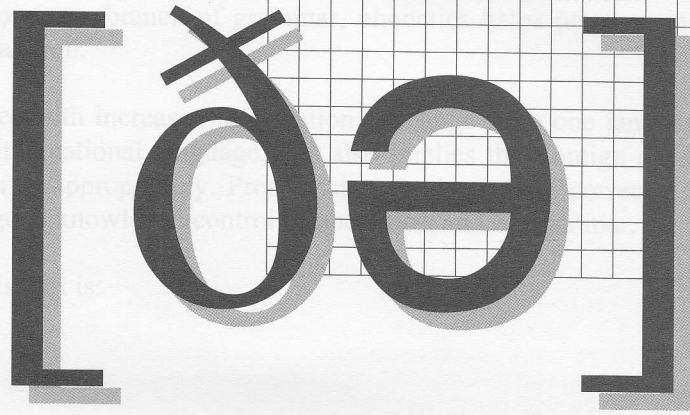
637

638

638

639





PH1: ENGLISH SOUNDS

PART 1: PHONETICS

USING THE ENGLISH PHONETIC ALPHABET

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ENGLISH PHONETICS

The *English language is fundamentally dependent on its phonetics*. That means, phonetics plays an important role in determining the right form of the morphologic sentence elements, and even in deciding on the meaning of our messages. In addition, as a branch of grammar, phonetics helps pronouncing the English words correctly, and the foreign one as well.

The globalization of our world comes with increased information exchange from one language to another; because English is “the” dominant international language, this also implies that foreign names need to be translated into English phonetic sounds appropriately. Pronouncing foreign names correctly is a matter of consideration, respect, and it shows good knowledge/control of phonetics, and of grammar.

The structure employed to present this part is:

PH1: English Sounds

PH2: Vowels

PH3: Semi-Vowels

PH4: Consonants

PH5: Diphthongs and Triphthongs

PH6: Pronouncing Foreign Names

PH1: ENGLISH SOUNDS

Considering its phonetics, English is particularly difficult to master due to the following aspects.

1. The greatest problem in English is, *words are pronounced differently compared to their written form*. There are words having one written form, though two different pronunciations, (“the apple”; “the man”), and there are words written differently, only they are pronounced the same: (“I like to read books”; “I got rid of all books”). In addition, there are words having the same form and the same pronunciation, but they take different meanings: (“I like to fly”; “the fly was terribly annoying”). In other words, English has plenty of “multiple” and “implicit” meanings.

2. *English lacks sounds specific to other languages*. There are very many known languages (existing, dead, and artificial languages) and they employ an incredible variety of sounds. However, with little efforts, and knowing the *phonetic alphabet*, all foreign sounds may be translated acceptably into English sounds.

3. *English has a few particular “English sounds”*. Despite the fact that English is a Latin-roots language, it has unique and specific sounds. Those particular English sounds form the so called “*British accent*”, and they are quite difficult to pronounce for all ESL students. English phonetics helps a lot the ESL students, except it needs to be “translated” into sounds specific to each foreign language. Note that the phonetics notions presented in this part are not sufficiently developed, therefore additional, more adequate references are strongly encouraged.

4. *Same written letters may have up to seven or eight different pronunciations*. Although there are some general rules of pronouncing the English words correctly, the number of exceptions is so great

that the best approach is to learn each word according to its phonetic translation.

The *English alphabet* contains 26 letters: they are pronounced as 36 “*basic sounds*”, and 47 “*phonetic sounds*” (a phonetic sound may group several basic sounds). In order to use English appropriately, ESL students and native speakers as well need to know the *phonetic alphabet*. “*Phonetic symbols*” correspond to the basic phonetic sounds, and they are always written within square brackets. For example, the phonetic sound [e] is the letter (and the sound) “e” from: “*ten*”, “*seven*”, “*error*”, “*lemon*”.

The following set of definitions explains a few phonetic notions which are further needed in this book, in *Morphology* part.

DEFINITION PH1

A “**phonetic sound**” is a distinct phonetic unit. Phonetic sounds are grouped in:

A1. “**basic sounds**”: vowels, semi-vowels, consonants;

A2. “**complex sounds**”: diphthongs, triphthongs.

“**Syllable**” is a group of phonetic sounds pronounced naturally together, and containing at least one vowel, or a semi-vowel. Generally, a syllable groups a few consonants around one or more vowels.

“**Words**” are formed from one or more phonetic syllables; therefore, they are further subcategorized as being: “**monosyllable**” or “**polysyllable**”.

“**Phonetics**” is the part of linguistics dealing with pronouncing the words of a language. In English, words are pronounced differently than their written form; therefore, phonetics becomes automatically a sub-branch of the English grammar needed to communicate (orally and in writing) meanings/ideas correctly.

Note that the symbols used to represent phonetic sounds in this book are the ones used in most international grammar books and dictionaries; however, in many publications phonetic symbols are written differently (particularly in N. America). Now, in order to identify the 36 phonetic symbols correctly, the method of “*the analog comparison of the well-known words*” is highly recommended. The *analog comparison method* is used a lot in English, therefore it is described in the following pages.

English phonetics differentiates the sounds as being: *basic sounds*, and *compound* (or *complex*) *sounds*. Further, the basic English sounds are: *vowels*, *semi-vowels*, and *consonants*. *Vowels* are ample, resonant sounds produced by the open or semi-open mouth. There are 12 vowels in English, and they are presented in details in the coming sections. *Consonants* are buffered sounds produced by an almost closed mouth, or while opening it. There are 22 English consonants, and they are further divided into “*pulmonic*” and “*non-pulmonic*”. *Semi-vowels* are only 2 sounds: they have characteristics common to both vowels and consonants.

Complex sounds are grouped in *diphthongs* and *triphthongs*. *Diphthongs* are groups of two vowels/semi-vowels pronounced together. English works with 9 diphthongs. *There are only 2 triphthongs* in English: they are groups of three vowels/semi-vowels pronounced together. The following chart presents graphically the structure of the English sounds.

CHART PH1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE ENGLISH SOUNDS

PHONETICS	BASIC SOUNDS		VOWELS	
			SEMI-VOWELS	
			CONSONANTS	PULMONIC
			NON-PULMONIC	
	COMPLEX SOUNDS		DIPHTHONGS	
		TRIPHTHONGS		

Particularly important in phonetics is *the accent*, marked by a reverse apostrophe ahead of the accentuated syllable. A few instances of accentuated syllables are highlighted in the following example.

EXAMPLES PH1

MARKING NATURAL PHONETIC ACCENT

John	-->	['dʒɒn]
three apples	-->	['θri: 'æplz]
Sit down, please.	-->	['sit 'daun pli:z]
I see Jane.	-->	[ai 'si: 'dʒein]
The clock is ticking.	-->	[ðə 'klɒk iz 'tikiŋ]

In a sentence, *natural phonetic accent* stresses the most important sentence elements: *nouns, main verbs, some adjectives, some adverbs, some pronouns, and numerals*.

PH2: VOWELS

Particular to English is, the *vowel sounds* have ample, harmonic resonance, and they have great frequency in words. It appears that English is one of the best suited languages for singing songs, due to its particular, melodious phonetics.

As mentioned, there are 12 vowels in English, but the difficult aspect is, there are many written letters representing one and the same vowel sound. In order to identify a vowel sound correctly (or any other sound), the *analog comparison of the well-known words method* is employed, which is specific to English. This method uses a few usual words, all having the same sound embedded, in order to help identifying the written forms (the letters) a particular sound could take.

The following table lists all vowel symbols accompanied by a few instances of usual words, each having the corresponding vowel sound embedded.

TABLE PH2: VOWEL SOUNDS

#	SYMBOL	FOUND IN
1	[ʌ]	<i>cup, sun, some, shut, cover, color, Canada, supper, sum</i>
2	[ɑ:]	(strong form) <i>large, dark, sharp, garden, part, car, are</i>
3	[ə]	<i>a, an, the, of, cover, other, labor, letter, finger</i>
4	[ɜ:] or [3:]	(strong form) <i>first, girl, person, her, fur, learn, sir</i>
5	[æ]	<i>apple, cat, lamp, jam, that, fat, bad, sand, man, Ann</i>
6	[i]	<i>is, in, the, finger, ring, index, it, lift, they, juicy</i>
7	[i:]	(strong form) <i>see, street, tree, sea, eat, leave, three, the</i>
8	[ɔ]	<i>Tom, on, dog, ox, lost, spot, clock, not, pop, knot, watch</i>
9	[ɔ:]	(strong form) <i>George, tall, door, your, for, horse</i>
10	[u]	<i>book, look, full, put, good, do, pudding, into, room</i>
11	[u:]	(strong form) <i>moon, two, roof, blue, juicy, Juliet, too</i>
12	[e]	<i>red, end, question, seven, ten, lemon, error, let, shell</i>

In *Table PH2*, phonetic vowels correspond to the letters in bold type—and they are quite different sometimes. Further references to the written form of the vowels are made in *Morphology*, part two in this book. Very important is, in *written form* vowels are represented by the letters: “a, e, i, o, u”. Another remarkable morphological aspect is, *vowels can form syllables alone*, or accompanied by consonants.

PH3: SEMI-VOWELS

There are only two *semi-vowel sounds*, and they have a double character: of a vowel, and of a consonant. However, in most instances semi-vowels behave as vowels do. The following table lists the two semi-vowels.

TABLE PH3: SEMI-VOWEL SOUNDS

#	SYMBOL	FOUND IN
13	[j]	<i>you, your, yes, student, yellow, few, nephew, Indian</i>
14	[w]	<i>with, white, window, week, word, watch, one, we, what</i>

Semi-vowels also *can form syllables* (alone or accompanied by consonants). In *written form*, semi-vowels are represented by: “y” and “w”.

PH4: CONSONANTS

Not all English consonants are equal, phonetically (and functionally), because they are produced in different ways. Accordingly, consonants are grouped in: *pulmonic*, and *non-pulmonic*. Further, each group is sub-categorized into many subgroups. However, in this book consonants are presented summarily, as being divided only in pulmonic and non-pulmonic because this division is needed in *part 2, Morphology*. The following table presents the group of pulmonic consonants.

Respect pentru oameni și cărți

TABLE PH4.1: THE GROUP OF PULMONIC CONSONANTS

#	SYMBOL	FOUND IN
15	[l]	<i>apple, middle, shelf, girl, full, leg, learn, loyal</i>
16	[r]	<i>red, roof, bright, garage, ring, error, street, bravo</i>
17	[ʒ]	<i>pleasure, vision, rouge</i>
18	[dʒ]	<i>June, large, jam, Jane, juicy, John, jade, garage</i>
19	[ð]	<i>the, with, this, other, brother, that, those, though</i>
20	[ŋ]	<i>ring, finger, king, charming, playing, thing, sing</i>
21	[b]	<i>bad, bench, but, Bulgaria, bun, big, bag, bait, bald</i>
22	[d]	<i>did, duck, Denmark, Danube, Denver, dent, dig, deny, depart</i>
23	[g]	<i>goat, grammar, give, gossip, gray, garment, gap, gross, egg</i>
24	[v]	<i>voice, vector, victory, vortex, veal, veggie, vehicle</i>
25	[z]	<i>zoo, zeal, zeta, zinc, zero, zeppelin, xylene, Xerox</i>
26	[m]	<i>man, marine, Maine, minor, mercury, my, mean, must, name</i>
27	[n]	<i>no, neither, new, neglected, nod, nothing, nor, neck</i>

NOTE

The consonant [ð] is a unique sound specific to English.

The non-pulmonic group of consonants is presented in the following table.

TABLE PH4.2: THE GROUP OF NON-PULMONIC CONSONANTS

#	SYMBOL	FOUND IN
28	[ʃ]	<i>sharp, short, sure, shut, Shakespeare, shock, shunt, English</i>
29	[tʃ]	<i>charming, picture, watch, question, chin, chimney</i>
30	[θ]	<i>mouth, three, thought, path, thick, thrust, thanks</i>
31	[p]	<i>put, pen, part, pastry, ping, plum, plenty, pull, pencil</i>
32	[t]	<i>tea, teacher, town, plate, Tom, tune, tent, trick, true</i>
33	[k] or [x]	<i>cat, Canberra, Canada, contract, quail, consonant, quake</i>
34	[f]	<i>fall, fungi, feel, fun, festival, France, fence, front</i>
35	[s]	<i>sound, so, secret, solstice, sun, sauce, sensation</i>
36	[h]	<i>hollow, hen, harbor, Hamburg, high, humble, hint, hut</i>

NOTE

The consonant [θ] is a unique sound specific to English.

In syllables, consonants are never pronounced alone: they are grouped around one or more vowels or semi-vowels. In *written form*, consonants are represented by: “b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, x, z”.

PH5: DIPHTHONGS AND TRIPHTHONGS

Diphthongs are two vowel sounds pronounced together; they are presented in the following table.

TABLE PH5.1: THE ENGLISH DIPHTHONGS

#	SYMBOL	FOUND IN
37	[ei]	<i>day, table, name, play, eight, labor, plate, May, stay</i>
38	[ai]	<i>I, white, five, buy, by, knife, sky, high, nine</i>
39	[ou]	<i>go, open, bone, yellow, zero, home, own</i>
40	[au]	<i>mouth, town, how, now, down</i>
41	[ɔi]	<i>boy, toy, noisy, Troilus</i>
42	[iə]	<i>here, zero, beer, we're, pioneer, dear</i>
43	[eə]	<i>pear, there, chair, airplane, hair</i>
44	[ʊə]	<i>your, four, goer</i>
45	[uə]	<i>poor, sure, plural, doer, sour</i>

Triphthongs are three sounds pronounced together; they are presented in the following table.

TABLE PH5.2: THE ENGLISH TRIPHTHONGS

#	SYMBOL	FOUND IN
46	[aiə]	<i>fire, violin, pioneer</i>
47	[auə]	<i>our, tower, flower</i>

PH6: PRONOUNCING FOREIGN AND UNKNOWN WORDS

English may be the only Latin-roots language employing 47 distinct sounds, and that richness in phonetic sounds should be sufficient to translate phonetically into English any foreign word. Unfortunately, things are not that shiny. Despite the fact there are so many distinct English sounds, most of them are specific to English, only; as a result, many foreign sounds have no English correspondent. The good news is, *there are techniques and methods of breaking and re-grouping the basic English sounds*, which allow for accurate reproduction in English of almost any foreign sound. If the readers intend to study English phonetics in details, two prestigious Internet sites are recommended:

- "UCL" (University College London) and;
- "IPA" (International Phonetic Association)—their Internet addresses are listed in *Bibliography* section.

Foreign names need to be translated into English using phonetic symbols for a correct pronunciation; the same technique is used for *neologisms* (new words) or for little known English words. *Phonetic translations* are inserted between square brackets in a few dictionaries and thesaurus books because, unfortunately, not all of them present phonetic translations. Following are the phonetic translations of a few foreign/unknown words.

EXAMPLES PH6

A. READING FOREIGN NAMES

Ghethe Dakka ['G h e θ e 'D ʌ k ʌ]
 Najé Xallas ['N æ dʒ e 'S ʌ l ʌ s]