

RECENZII / COMPTES RENDUS / REVIEWS

Seth R. Katz. 2020. *American English Grammar. An Introduction*. Routledge: New York and London, xii + 320 pp.

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The book under review, Seth R. Katz's *American English Grammar. An Introduction* represents an introductory textbook to American English grammar. The book consists of an "Introduction" (pp. 1-17), 13 chapters (pp. 18-312) and an "Index" (pp. 313-320).

In "Introduction" (pp. 1-17) the author explains the idea behind the title of the book and how Standard English came to be associated with "proper" or "grammatically correct" English. Included here is also a summary of the book, some guidelines regarding Non-Standard American Varieties, followed by acknowledgements, abbreviations and conventions used throughout the book.

Chapter 1, "Sentences; Parts of Speech and Their Phrases" (pp. 18-29), starts with a brief review of the elements that make up a sentence (e.g., subjects, verbs, verb complements and sentence modifiers). The following section addresses the parts of speech and their phrases. The authors provide as an example the word 'play' which can function both as a verb and as a noun. Also included here is a discussion on non-standard plurals. In some varieties of American English, the plural marker -s can be deleted. This is due to the fact that a separate word highlights that the noun is plural in reference and thus the -s is semantically redundant. African American Vernacular English is a case in point (e.g., Two *boy_* just left.) (Dillard, 1972: 61; Rickford and Rickford, 2000: 110) The chapter ends with some key points and exercises meant to check the theoretical aspects presented.

Chapter 2, "Nouns (N) and Noun Phrases (NP)" (pp. 30-44) is divided into four parts. The first one tackles noun features. Nouns are usually classified according to four criteria: proper/common; singular/plural; mass/count; generic/specific. The second section focuses on noun phrases (NP). The general structure of an NP is presented and exemplified. The following section delves into noun phrase functions (e.g., subject of a clause, complement of a preposition, complement of a verb, etc.). Included here are also examples from non-standard varieties of English, most notably from African American Vernacular English. The last part of the chapter contains some exercises.

Chapter 3, "Prepositions (P) and Prepositional Phrases (PP)" (pp. 45-59), opens with a discussion regarding the form and function of prepositions. Prepositions are function

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words used to convey meaning “about the relative locations and movements of actions and objects in space and time, as well as more abstract relations like possession, source and a host of other literal and metaphoric relationships” (p.45). The form and function of prepositional phrases are highlighted in the next part of the chapter. A prepositional phrase is made up of a preposition followed by a nominal which functions as the complement of the preposition (P+ NOMINAL: PCOMP). The last very briefly dwells on prepositions and language variation. The author states that the use of prepositions and particles is highly idiomatic and some of these idioms vary by region. The chapter ends with some exercises meant to check the theoretical notions presented.

In Chapter 4, “Adjectives (ADJ) and Adjective Phrases (ADJP); Determiners (D) and Determiner Phrases (DP)” (pp. 60-77), the author describes adjective forms (gradable and absolute) in standard and non-standard English, including also degrees of comparison (comparatives and superlatives). The discussion swiftly moves to the forms and functions of adjective phrases. ADJPs have two functions: modifier of a noun (e.g., This is a *very close* race), and complement of a verb (e.g., The race is *very close*). In the second part of the chapter, the author tackles the notions of determiners and determiner phrases. The former represents a category of function words and appear only in NPs. Different types of determiners (central, pre-determiners, post-determiners) are presented. The discussion focuses not only on Standard English, but also on non-standard English. In varieties of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the possessive suffix ‘s can be absent (e.g., The *man* hat is on the chair). In AAVE it is considered grammatical to mark possession “by adjacency or context” (p. 69). The subsequent section describes the forms and functions of determiner phrases. The author also explains why determiners are different from adjectives (adjectives are content words, determiners are function words; adjective are an open class determiners are a closed class; adjectives are gradable; determiners are not gradable, etc.) and why numbers are considered to be determiners. The chapter ends with some exercises.

Chapter 5, “Pronouns (PRON) and Pronoun Phrases (PRONP)” (pp. 78-95), is a detailed description of another category of function words, i.e., pronouns. Traditional grammar analyses pronouns as words that can replace a noun. The six types of pronouns (e.g., personal, reflexive, indefinite, demonstrative, interrogative and relative) are exemplified. Non-standard pronoun forms are also highlighted in AAVE, where we usually come across “regularization of the possessive pronoun mines by analogy with yours, his, hers, etc., (*Mines* is here. It’s *mines*)” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006: 382), and in vernacular Appalachian English and other rural varieties. The second section delves into pronoun attributes: case, number, person, gender and animateness. Relevant examples are provided to illustrate each of the attributes aforementioned. Section three focuses on pronoun functions, which fulfill the same functions as NPs and other nominals. However, PRONs have to agree with their referent (antecedent, postcedent, common knowledge object, or object in the physical context of discourse). Also included here is a short section on how to identify pronouns. The chapter ends with some key points and exercises meant to help students master the types, usage and functions of pronouns.

In chapter 6, “Verbs (V)”, (pp. 96-139), the author provides a detailed description of verbs in standard and non-standard American English. Verbs represent a category of

content words and are an open class. Verbs can be divided into several subcategories, but the largest two are finite and non-finite verbs. This chapter focuses more on finite verbs, i.e., verbs that can function as the head of a VP. Non-finite verbs are discussed, at length, in Chapter 12. A distinction is drawn between lexical verbs, auxiliary verbs and modal auxiliary verbs. The tenses of verbs are discussed at length in both standard and nonstandard English. In nonstandard English the author focuses on the regularization of irregular verbs. Modality, aspect and voice are also tackled and relevant examples are provided and commented upon. The second section guides the reader on how to identify verbs. The chapter ends with some key point and exercises focusing on tense, mood, aspect and voice.

The discussion started in chapter 6 continues in Chapter 7 “Verb Phrases (VP)” (pp. 140-168). A finite verb functions as the head of a VP and the VP, in turn, functions as a predicate (VP:Pred). The author stresses the fact that a VP “always contains a complete finite verb (with or without AUX and/or semi-AUX verbs) and may include complements and/or modifiers. The first section of the chapter provides a detailed description of verb complements (*intransitive verbs, monotransitive verbs, ditransitive verbs, phrasal verbs*). It is worth mentioning that apart from the relevant examples from Standard English, that illustrate all the above-mentioned types of verbs, the author also provides examples from non-standard varieties of American English and accounts for them. The chapter ends with a section dedicated to exercises.

Chapter 8, “Adverbs (Adv) and Adverb Phrases (AdvP)” (pp. 169-185), is devoted to adverbs, a mixed category, comprising content words (e.g., *slowly, here, frequently*, etc.) but also function words (e.g., *very, just, not*). In traditional grammar, adverbs are usually described as words that modify a verb, adjective, or another verb. Actually, adverbs and AdvPs modify entire sentences, dependent clauses, infinitive phrases and participle phrases. The author shows that in non-standard English, the *-ly* suffix that is usually attached to adverbs, is missing. American English speakers, he acknowledges, “commonly say I feel bad rather than I feel badly; even street signs say Go Slow, not Go Slowly” (p. 170). It appears that in Southern varieties of American English, “particularly Southern mountain varieties such as Appalachian and Ozark English, *-ly* absence extends to more words” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006: 378). Regarding adverb phrases, they can function in five roles: complement of verb (e.g., *Winter is here.*), modifier of verb (e.g., *She slept well*), sentence modifier (e.g., *Very frequently* my husband’s work takes him away from home.), modifier of Adj (e.g., *This is very good*), modifier of Adv (e.g., *We have hardly ever seen anything of the kind*). This is followed by a section dedicated to three tests that can be used in order to identify adverbs (i.e., the adverb question test, the movability test and the pair test for adverbs modifying adjectives). Examples from AAVE (*steady* and *fucking* used as adverbial intensifiers) are also provided and commented upon. The next section addresses the topic of negation in both standard and non-standard American English. The negator *ain’t* is discussed at length together with instances of multiple negation or negative concord. The last section includes a number of exercises that focus on adverb phrases.

Chapter 9, “Conjunctions (Conj)” (pp. 186-206), explores another category of function words and a very stable closed class. The issues covered are: coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, or*); conjoining punctuation (commas, semicolons, dashes and parentheses,

hyphens). The chapter also includes a brief discussion of interjections (simple interjections, conjunctive interjections, elliptical interjections). As usual, the last part of the chapter contains exercises that focus on the use of conjunctions and conjoining punctuation.

In Chapter 10 “Clauses” (pp. 207-248), the author changes the tune, in the sense that the emphasis is no longer on a particular word class, but on different types of clauses. English is deemed as SVC language, meaning that the order of the clause is typically Subject-Verb-Complement. The first part of the chapter looks at independent clauses (a.k.a. Sentences), i.e., interrogative sentences, imperative mood sentences, expletive *there*, expletive *it*, passive voice, inversion. The second section provides an overview of dependent clauses (i.e., constituents within independent clauses). The author writes that “dependent clauses function within their container clauses in many of the ways that other adjectivals, nominals, and adverbials function in clauses” (p. 220). Among the dependent clauses discussed we find: adjective clauses, noun clauses, adverb clauses. In each case examples from both Standard American English and non-standard varieties of American English are provided and explained. The chapter ends with a section containing exercises.

Chapter 11, “Nominals, Adjectivals, and Adverbials” (pp. 249-263), scrutinizes the types of phrases and clauses that can function as nominals, adjectivals and adverbials. The author attempts to offer a fresh perspective on categorizing adverbials by their scope of reference and their position in a phrase or clause. The chapter is strewn with well-chosen examples and the explanations provided are easy to follow. The last section includes a generous number of exercises meant to check understanding.

In Chapter 12, “Non-Finite Verb Phrases” (pp. 264-307), the author embarks on a journey into the most intricate part of English grammar: non-finite verb phrases, also known as participle and infinitive phrases. In the Introduction, the author wrote that “many grammar text-books simply avoid dealing with them all, which annoyed me enough that is started me down the road of writing this book” (p. 7).” The first section of the chapter tackles participles and participle phrases. In a nominal participle phrase, the participle is always a present participle (e.g., *Baking* is my favorite activity.). This sentence cannot be rephrased as **Baked* is my favorite activity. Past participles cannot function as nominals. This means that a participle phrase with a past participle “must be functioning as an adjectival or an adverbial” (p. 269). In the case of adjectival participle phrases, if it functions as an adjectival, like other adjectival constituents, it can be a modifier of a noun. Adverbial participle phrases can function as sentence or clause modifiers, or even as adjuncts. The second section delves into infinitives and infinitive phrases. Usually, the infinitive appears as the particle *to* plus the base form of the verb (e.g., *To smoke* is vital.). There are instances in which the particle *to* is deleted from the infinitive following DO after certain verbs (e.g., I just saw you *kick* her.). This construction is known as “bare infinitive”. The author notes that the complete participle or infinitive may include perfect, progressive, and passive AUX verbs and semi-modal and imperfect aspectual verbs. Another important aspect is that participle phrases and infinitive phrases can be preceded by a limited variety of subordinators.

The last chapter, “A Grand Review Exercise” (pp. 308-312), contains a review exercise, in which the reader is given an essay from a magazine and the task is to

identify all of the phrase and clause structures discussed in the book. The main aim is to review but also reinforce the notions studied and to check how much the reader has learned.

Seth Katz successfully succeeds in writing an accessible introductory textbook to the intricacies of American English grammar. The presentation and analysis are refined, yet easy-to-follow for a neophyte. The fact that the author combines the structures of Standard English and presents the peculiarities found in non-standard varieties of American English (AAVE, Appalachian English, Ozark English, Southern rural varieties, etc.), add value and originality to this textbook. Language has to be understood in all its forms and shapes, and non-standard language is the language spoke by the majority of us. The fact that each chapter contains a section dedicated to exercises to check understanding of the topics covered in that respective chapter adds weight to the value of the book.

In conclusion, *American English Grammar. An Introduction* by Seth R. Katz is a noteworthy and very welcome contribution to the ever-growing study of American English for which the author is to be commended.

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