

REVIEW

An introduction to English sentences. 2004. By Bolaji Aremo. Ibadan: SCRIBO Publications Limited. 2 vols.

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First published in 1995 and reprinted in 1997 in two volumes, *An introduction to English sentences* satisfies the yearnings of those students of English grammar who try to avoid, in Nigerian parlance, 'hungry authors' (i.e. authors whose main aim of writing a book is commerce); the author has merged the two volumes in this new edition of the book to facilitate easy accessibility and reduce the cost of the book.

In the preface to the first edition, the author states categorically that:

the book is intended primarily as a basic text for students in English departments [...] in countries where English is a second or foreign language.
(p. xiii)

This explains the simplicity of the language, the depth of the discussions and the test-yourself exercises provided in the text.

The major strength of this book lies in the descriptive style of writing. The author presents a meticulous account of the structure of acceptable English sentences and pinpoints areas that the foreign learner of English may find difficult. For example, intricate concepts such as rules of concord and tense, the nature and structures of sentences, clauses and words (including affixes) are discussed.

Another impressive aspect of the book is the organisation of ideas into topics and sub-topics. These are arranged in such a way that related items are discussed in adjacent sub-sections; sometimes, when a related idea does not qualify to be under any of the sub-sections, it is put under 'Notes'. Ideas, whether directly related or not, are often brought together through co-reference (with reference numbers). This ensures easy accessibility of relevant information to the reader.

The author does not limit his discussions to mere structural analysis; he goes further to discuss the context of occurrence of the expressions discussed. Thus the book contains examples which explicate the acceptable and unacceptable usages of some expressions, show distinctions between formal and colloquial usages and sometimes, bring out some uncommon usages which the learner might be meeting for the first time.

However, readers looking for definitions of terms in this book may be disappointed. The author uses a method which enables him to begin with a general description of ideas and narrow this down to the intended concept. This method has the

advantage of discouraging learners from merely memorizing definitions without any deep understanding of the concepts or definitions so memorized.

Although the work contains many traditional grammar terms and concepts, the author's familiarity with Halliday's Systemic Grammar and works such as Boadi et al. (1968), Quirk and Greenbaum (1979) and Huddleston (1976) is amply demonstrated in the book. Their influence shows in the parsing of structures, the contextualization of expressions and the organisation of the book. The difference, however, lies in the depth of explanations and the emphasis on foreign learners in the book under review.

Another aspect is the distinction drawn between phrase-part and clause-part complex sentences. This is a distinction between sentences in which clauses form part of a phrase and those in which the subordinate clauses stand alone. It is not clear, however, whether the author intends to substitute these terms for the more traditional terms: nominal, adverbial and relative/adjectival clauses. This could create some confusion, as the author still continues to use the traditional terms.

An important component without which the book could have been considered incomplete is the discussion on lexis. The author not only discusses the relationships that obtain among words, but also explains word-formation processes. He classifies affixes into different groups, showing different semantic and grammatical categories.

Furthermore, the book provides clues on the spellings and pronunciations of different categories of words such as the plural morpheme, the third person singular present verb suffix, the genitive marker, the past tense suffix and a few others for clarity purposes. The book also discusses stress patterns of some words to show the different pronunciations and uses in specific contexts. These are accompanied with phonemic transcriptions. Learners thus have the opportunity of acquiring each word with its grammatical status, normal pronunciation and usage.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of the book might be confusing to the foreign or L2 learner of English. For instance, the author does not explain why he considers the following expressions acceptable.

- (1) I know the girl whose you found. (p.169)
- (2) I met the man $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{whose you took down.} \\ \text{whose was stolen. (p. 465)} \end{array} \right.$

Learners may require further explanation of the grammatical status of these expressions.

Some analyses of complex sentences can also be confusing. Using the traditional grammar concepts of main and subordinate clauses, the author refers to the entire complex sentence as a main clause and the embedded adverbial clause as a subordinate clause. The principal clause on which the adverbial clause depends is not identi-

fied (pp. 398, 401 and 402). This type of analysis differs from the traditional analysis as exemplified by Freeborn (1995: 403) and Kuiper and Allan (1996: 254).

Furthermore, the author discusses stative and dynamic verbs but ignores other types such as relational, reporting, process, dynamic, perception, etc. which could be beneficial to the learner.

Despite these weaknesses, however, the book remains one of the best English grammars. It is an invaluable resource for every learner of the English language.

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