The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (review)

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Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, eds. In collaboration with Laurie Bauer, Betty Birner, Ted Briscoe, Peter Collins, David Denison, David Lee, Anita Mittwoch, Geoffrey Nunberg, Frank Palmer, John Payne, Peter Peterson, Lesley Stirling, Gregory Ward. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002. Pp. xvii + 1,842. US$150.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Lori Morris, *Université du Québec à Montréal*

The *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (CamG)* is an extremely complete work. It brings to the grammatical world twenty substantial chapters dealing with a wide range of topics, an impressive list of contributors and a reasonable array of suggested readings and references. It also brings with it a rather interesting polemic that began with an early review of the work on the Linguist List (Mukherjee, Linguist List 13.1853), grew into a flurry of exchanges between Joybrato Mukherjee and Geoffrey Pullum (Linguist List 13.1932.1, 13.2005.1), and finally expanded to include the opinions of all linguists who have come into possession of a copy of the *Cambridge Grammar* and pulled out their acronymically identical *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (CompG)* (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik 1985) to undertake an inevitable comparison of the two works. Indeed, it is impossible to assess Huddleston and Pullum's volume without judging it against Quirk et al.'s work and without coming down on one side or the other of the grammatical allegiance fence. Succumbing to the forces of inevitability, this review will assess the *CamG* in light of the *CompG*, and will do so with a bias born of the author's philosophy of grammar.

The preliminary chapter of the *CamG* provides a highly readable introduction to the work. This chapter, which constiues one of the strong points of the work, fulfils the authors' promise to offer a grammar that is accessible to a general educated public. The canonical–non-canonical sentence distinction outlined therein is both simple and elegant. The grammar goes on to build on this opposition in a coherent manner in the syntactic overview of the second chapter and in subsequent chapters devoted to various sentence structures. This systematic development provides the work with a sense of cohesion and coherence and to a certain extent offsets some of the organizational problems discussed below.

Chapters devoted to nouns and the noun phrase are generally well done. The section on the system of number in English is laudable and reaches beyond what the *CompG* has to offer. In contrast, the section on gender fails to match the detail and quality of the explanation offered by the competition. The numerous chapters devoted to grammar at the sentence level are both complete and pleasantly readable. To my mind, they constitute the principal strength of the work. Another plus is the chapter devoted to information packaging. It is a timely and welcome addition. Very few grammar books move beyond syntax and morphology in such a coherent and compelling manner.

One of the problems of the *CamG* is related to its organization and the scattering of noun phrase and verb phrase components throughout the book. Although it is difficult, if

not impossible, to find an organizational formula that will satisfy all users, one wonders whether some regrouping of like elements might not be done for a subsequent edition. For example, the reader with an interest in the verb phrase needs to start from Chapter 3 and then move on to Chapters 4, 7, 9, 10, 14, and 18 for other essential verb phrase information. Key topics such as inflectional morphology and negation are treated very late in the volume, well removed from the core verbal discussion of the third chapter. To be fair, the *CompG* suffers from similar organizational problems in some fields.

In a number of respects the *CamG* compares very favourably indeed to the *CompG*. It starts from a simple, well-stated premise, and then builds logically on this base through analyses of a commendable array of grammatical subsystems. However, there is one important area in which the Huddleston and Pullum work fails to match the quality of the Quirk et al. volume: that is in its description and analysis of the English verbal system. In its explanation of time, tense, mood and aspect, the *CamG* lacks the coherence and consistency of the *CompG*. Problems begin when Huddleston, the author of most of the sections dealing with the verb, uses the term *tense* for unlike things. While the primary tense distinction (preterite–present) corresponds to a past–non-past opposition that most grammarians would agree with, the secondary tense distinction, which opposes the perfect and the non-perfect, goes down less well, particularly when it is applied to non-finite verb forms, as in the examples given on pages 116 and 139: *He may* have known *her* (perfect) as opposed to *He may know her* (non-perfect), *He wrote it last week* (preterite) and *He is believed to have written it last week* (perfect tense). How this opposition can be considered to be rooted in tense is the first of a number of mysteries of the verb phrase according to the *CamG*. A few pages later, a section is devoted to the present perfect as a compound tense (p. 142). One is presumably to understand that compound tense is the same as secondary tense, but more consistent naming of forms would be useful. The problem is compounded when, still within the confines of Chapter 3, the reader finds references to deictic tense, non-deictic present tense, and backshifted tense. This proliferation of tense distinctions leads one to wonder what the bottom-line definition of tense really is in the *CamG*.

A further verbal wrinkle is added when a distinction is made between perfective and imperfective aspect. As the examples used by Huddleston reveal, this aspectual difference is not founded on any consistent morphological contrast, but instead on contextual semantic oppositions: *He played golf on Wednesday* (perfective) as opposed to *Even in those days he played golf every Wednesday* (imperfective) (p. 124). Some forty pages after the initial mention of the perfective–imperfective contrast, Huddleston includes a full section on the progressive aspect in which he makes a distinction between progressive aspect, defined syntactically as BE + V-ing, and progressive aspectuality, defined semantically in terms of the presumed lack of completion of an event (p. 163). It is at this point that the author finally makes a link with the topic perfective and imperfective broached earlier in the chapter, stating that progressive aspectuality is "a special case of imperfectivity" that provides an internal view of an event. By this point, the reader looking for a quick verbal fix is in a state of total confusion and ready to look for alternative source of information.

From the sentence-level onward the *CamG* is a laudable work. It provides an excellent, accessible look at sentence structure, semantics, and pragmatics. It has broken new ground in its inclusion of pragmatically oriented topics previously confined to text grammars. The examples used are pertinent and, in almost all instances, both plausible and convincing. This marks a pleasant change from many prescriptively oriented grammars that show little if any tolerance for differences in dialect. Below the sentence-level, however, the *CamG* has

serious shortcomings. The discussion of the verb phrase, the hinge pin of English grammar in the eyes of many, is often confusing, and users looking for clear definitions of mood, tense and aspect are unlikely to come away satisfied and well informed. Thus, at the risk of being labelled a grammatical Luddite, I can conclude that the *CamG* is unlikely to replace or even displace the *CompG* on my shelf. For those with an interest in sentence-level grammar, however, Huddleston and Pullum's work might well prove more appealing than Quirk et al.'s and ultimately come to be their grammar of predilection.

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Emmanuelle Labeau et Pierre Larrivée, dir. *Les temps du passé français et leur enseignement*. Dans la collection *Cahiers Chronos* 9. Amsterdam : Rodopi. 2002. vii + 241 pages. 52 $US (broché).

Compte rendu par Paul Pupier, *Université du Québec à Montréal*[1]

Cet ouvrage contient une sélection de communications présentées lors de l'atelier du même titre « tenu le 25 mars 1999 à l'université d'Aston, au cœur de la britannique Birmingham » (avant-propos)[2]. Nos auteurs ne présentent pas un consensus sur les points qu'ils abordent. La racine des désaccords se trouve parfois dans les intuitions divergentes sur les exemples

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[1] Les commentaires de Brendan Gillon m'ont permis de remarquer certaines erreurs dans une première version du présent compte rendu.

[2] Il n'est donc pas surprenant que l'anglais soit aussi fréquemment considéré et constitue la langue d'un des articles. En plus de l'avant-propos des codirecteurs du volume, les contributions sont les suivantes : « Les nouveaux temps du passé ? », par Dulcie M. Engel (p. 1–13) ; « L'opposition perfectif/imperfectif dans le passé français », par Douglas L. Rideout (p. 15–29) ; « The semantics of the passé composé in contemporary French : towards a unified representation », par Marie-Eve Ritz (p. 31–50) ; « Sémantique conceptuelle et sémantique référentielle du passé composé » (p. 51–69), par P. Larrivée ; « Point de vue et aspect en français et en anglais », par Françoise Labelle (p. 71–89) ; « La structuration logico-temporelle du texte : le passé simple et l'imparfait du français », par Arie Molendijk (p. 91–104) ; « Passé composé, imparfait et présent dans les récits journalistiques : des alternances aux ruptures temporelles », par Bénédicte Facques (p. 105–133) ; « Écarts entre manuels et réalités : un problème pour l'enseignement des temps du passé à des étudiants d'un niveau avancé », par Anne Judge (p. 135–156) ; « Circonstants atténuants : l'adjonction de localisateurs temporels aux formes passées dans la production écrite d'apprenants anglophones avancés », par E. Labeau (p. 157–179) ; « L'acquisition