



# Making Sense Of Grammar

*David Crystal*

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## **Making Sense Of Grammar** David Crystal

The author explains structure and then shows how it works in different language contexts - the literary, the non-literary, the spoken and the written. He explores a wide range of linguistic themes including sociolinguistics, language acquisition and register, and shows how our language can be interpreted.

## **Making Sense Of Grammar Details**

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## From Reader Review Making Sense Of Grammar for online ebook

### Lamilla says

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### Steve says

Crystal steers the path between grammar-fussing, i.e., as if the laws of grammar were immutable; and floppy-bunny grammatical relativism, i.e., as if grammar was an arbitrary set of rules.

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### Ellen says

Books that explore about language, grammar and writing are my guilty pleasure. I consider the injunctions presented as I am absorbed by the text, trying to figure out if the writers are following their own instructions. I also hope that I will learn something from them I can use in my own efforts.

It has also become clear that the circle of writers who produce these books know each other (or at least each other's efforts) and constitute a genteelly competitive lot. There are nods to one another and the occasional dig. Language and usage evolve—some writers are more conservative, others more comfortable with change.

Some writers too, are more prescriptive (specifying what is correct and incorrect in terms of usage) and others more descriptive (more focused on the meaning expressed in a sentence). The former emphasizes the parts of speech and the rules that apply to them. The latter starts with the communication intended and determines the syntax that best gets the job done.

David Crystal makes his partisanship clear in the title: *Making Sense: The Glamorous Story of English Grammar* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He believes in the teaching and discussion of grammar, just not for its own sake. His fascination with the discipline is evident from the start as he provides, between preface and introduction, a brief demonstration of the etymological twinship of “grammar” and “glamour/glamor”: “secret knowledge” becomes “charm, attractiveness, physical allure.”

Crystal's approach follows the cognitive development of his daughter Suzie and how her grammar develops from sentences of a single verb or noun when she is about eighteen months old to more precise and subtle locutions when she is three or four or five years old. In doing so she demonstrates how grammar transforms ambiguity into clarity.

In doing so he also presents the problem of applying Latin rules, the rules associated with a morphological grammar in which word endings and spellings (inflections) demonstrate relationships and convey meanings, to a language that is obdurately uninflected. As he points out, We're still trying to get rid of the pernicious influence of Latin on the way we think about English grammar. Several of the worries people have about 'correct' usage are the consequence of being conditioned to think about English as if it were Latin. (p.32)

The further I read, the more I realized that I myself am something of a prescriptivist and that when I correct essays in my art history classes I provide explanations that are more focused on the “correctness” of the

usage than the reasons why the errors students make obscure and subvert their intended meaning. I have a lot of Asian students already struggling with working in a language as different as English is from Chinese or Korean. I also have a lot of learning-disabled students or just ill-educated students whose ability to write coherent English is limited.

Hmmm. That definitely gives me something to think about.

Recognizing my failures in this way is only the first step to rectifying them. Unfortunately, as Crystal points out in the preface, pedagogical suggestions have been excised from this book. Those suggestions on grammar-teaching, focused as they were on the situation in the United Kingdom, "were felt by the publisher to be too parochial for an international readership." (p. x) He has, however, made them available on his website, so I plan to take a look.

Where does this book fit on the shelves dedicated to the English language and writing? Not sure but the space is there.

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### **Putu Sita Witari says**

An interesting book about a bit of grammar history and how grammar is perceived since hundred years ago. It's presented in very clear and concise way, by dividing the content into small units which each is wrapped with witty vintage illustrations.

Though hardly to tell if this book is special for a language learner or regular non-fiction reader, I still suggest you to pick it up for answering your question when learning English language in class: Why grammar is not easy? Why do I need to learn grammar?

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### **Joanna says**

Well this could have been a whole lot better. It's a really intelligent overview of grammar and approaches to grammar teaching. Even where the information is not new, Crystal is impressive in his ability to synthesize and cross reference the different schools of thought. What weakens this book, though, is the "voiceover." Crystal's narratorial persona is fusty and a tad condescending, and the world he inhabits feels like an idealized version of 1950s Britain -- so no, not very relatable.

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### **Emily Michael says**

Outstanding as always. David Crystal does not disappoint in this latest installment. It's a fascinating and fun look into the history, social implications, and pedagogy of grammar!

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### **bup says**

Grammar's awesome.

## **Lokyan Ng says**

"Grammar is a system of systems, within which we make choices that convey meanings and effects. It should never be studied in isolation from other properties of language that contribute to meaningful and effective communication - in particular, the perspectives provided by semantics and pragmatics. It is these that show us how to relate structures and uses, take grammar beyond the basic level of "naming of parts" and mechanical parsing, and point us in the direction of explanations for our grammatical behavior that are intellectually stimulating and emotionally appealing. In a word, they give grammar its glamour. "

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## **Hanli says**

**I learn "English "again by crystal.**

As a failure chinese English learner, I 'm so happy i can read the books of author, the first is spell it out, this book is also pretty well. My English teacher of China just told me grammar, but author taught me grammar

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## **Brian Weisz says**

Uses the story of an infant learning a first language to explain grammar. Fun and interesting!

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## **Tomohiro Kuwabara says**

True significance of Grammar

This is a creative nonfiction work written by David Crystal, a professor of Linguistics at the University of Wales, targeting widely from linguistics expert to those who with little or no grammatical knowledge of English. Like many English learners, I found learning English grammar challenging and not entertaining through what the author calls "unhappy learning experience." Why was learning grammar not interesting? To begin with, what is grammar? Where did grammar come from? Why do we need to study grammar? Readers should find answers to those fundamental questions. Reading through this book was like a long journey through time and space to find out how the present English grammar has been established, full of surprises and new discoveries.

The first significance of the book is its attention-drawing organizational technique. To be honest, it was a big challenge for me to read out this book mainly because of the presence of the unfamiliar abstract terminology. Nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, and dative are some of the examples, and they were still workable because at least, I knew or could understand the notion of the terms in my mother tongue, Japanese. However, when it came to "iambic pentameter", "syntax" or "morphology", I was forced to stop reading to search for the meaning of the concept they possess or to read their explanations repeatedly. In addition, reading the old English for me was like learning a foreign language in a foreign language. Assuming probably that readers should face those challenges, the author prompts different approaches to avoid losing readers' attention. The obvious example is at the beginning of the book, starting with a shocking

story that the author was asked by one of his university's English native students in Liverpool, "What's a preposition?", making him "gobsmacked". Another example is observed where describing the process of the development of grammar since ancient time was explained along with the detailed process of how little children acquire English grammar. This combination is highly creative, making the story line entertaining. The third example is found where the progressive form of the verb "know" is deliberately used in the context of explaining that more progressive forms are used recently. By putting the controversial use of "knowing" in his writing, he succeeded in making his point clear and again, entertaining.

The second significance of the book is his multitiered approach to describe the present state of English grammar and its characteristics. After explaining the history of the birth and transition of English grammar over the past centuries, the author points out the gradualness in transition of grammar in comparison with words. As sputnik became a universal word in 1957 overnight, the speed of words' transition is quite fast; on the other hand, grammar takes more than at least a year or sometimes over a hundred years to change. Then the presence of grammatical distinctive characters among different occupations is explored. The uniqueness of religious, legal, sports, and journalism English are some of the clear examples. Also, readers will observe the vast diversity of English across the world at present. The different use of verbs and nouns, and the difference in their conjugations between England and U.S. are well-known; however, how many people know that, in different locations of England, there are alternatives to express you are when addressing a single person, such as thou are, thee art, thou is, you be, or you bin? How many people know that it is widespread in South East Asia to add la, lo, or ma at the end of the sentence to express that speakers are in rapport, speaking informally, being amicable?

The third significance of this book is its fair view on how grammar and the way it is learned are supposed to be. On one hand, the author points out that everyone who receives a school education needs to learn to read and write standard English grammar to facilitate inter-regional communication in today's highly diversified society. But on the other hand, he acknowledges the presence and the importance of the non-standard grammar that enables groups of people to express their regional or cultural identity, adding that this needs to be respected. As for the learning, although it has been repeated that the extreme prescriptive approach --- the kind of pedantry which insists that there are unique rules which must be followed in any case --- was the major factor causing the confusion among even native English users today, the author acknowledges the necessity of prescriptive grammar if it is based on English linguistic reality. He states, "grammar should never be divorced from meaning."

Looking back over all the themes, examples, and messages covered in the book, I sensed that the author's strong desire and the book's prime purpose is to transform the dominant negative perception towards grammar, which is typically coming from the "unhappy leaning experience", into something highly relevant and useful in everyday life. Everybody wants to be understood. This book told me that grammar is the right tool to help that, by conveying our messages precisely. After reading, I searched for the opportunities to learn more about English grammar. From this fact, I judge the purpose of the book has been achieved.

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### **Steven Kolber says**

This might be fun if you have never been taught or studies grammar, I felt by aiming at too broad an audience it made itself very skimmable. Lots of things were overexplained, always fun references to idiosyncrasies though. The anecdotes of childhood language development were especially joyous.

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### **Mike Gowan says**

This book is topnotch. It is pitched to the reader who has some background in grammar and probably teaches English in an elementary school. It relates the history of teaching English grammar, from its bad beginnings, based on Latin grammar, to its rebirth in the study of the structure of the English.

I liked the examples, especially the character of Suzie as she learned how to construct sentences from words. It made me want to get out my Chaucer again, because I do recall that Middle English is a lot like Modern English in the way it works to make sense.

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### **Michael Byrne says**

I'm really enjoying (Crystal has a lot of say on that usage) this recent series of books that esteemed linguist David Crystal has been putting out. Grammar is not the most glamorous subject but one that is hugely important if we are to make sense of what people say and write, and if people are able to make sense of what we utter. Crystal's a descriptivist and that emphasis on describing English's ever-evolving grammar and its role in the making of meaning is what makes me enjoy this book so much. Well worth a read.

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### **Magdalena Golden says**

This is the first book I've read by David Crystal and I'm sure it's not going to be the last. In fact, I've already bought two more by him and they got bumped up to the top of my reading list.

This book is an absolutely fantastic introduction to grammar. A must-read for anyone with an interest in it and, in fact, for anyone who thinks they are not interested based on their miserable experience in school - prepare to be amazed!

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