

THE RATIONALIZATION OF GRAMMAR

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The activities of the Institute for Research in English Teaching during the last ten years have been varied and numerous. The Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Institute provides a welcome opportunity for stock-taking of past achievements and for looking forward to the future. Much has been done, notably in the department of lexicological research. Much yet remains to be done. Especially in the field of grammar there is room for further exploration. What is to be the use and place of grammar in the classroom and the text-book? Tentative steps have already been taken. Those who are familiar with I.R.E.T. publications will realize the advance in technique illustrated in such text-books as the "Graded Exercises in English Composition" to accompany the Standard Readers and the "Pupils' Manuals" to accompany the Girls' Readers now being issued.

But renewed and constantly renewed efforts are still required for the rationalization of grammar. The foreign student of English (except, perhaps, when he arrives at the University stage) has no need of formal grammar and still less need of historical grammar. Yet it is precisely this formal and historical grammar that he is offered. The need for rationalized Readers has already been realized and met. But we have not yet realized, or we have only partially realized, that a system of English grammar suited to the needs or supposed needs of English students may be quite unsuited to the needs of foreign students. For the English schoolboy, the "grammar" lesson (generally the best-hated period in the school schedule) means parsing and analysis. What has the foreign student of English to do with this? His needs are quite different. Synthesis, not analysis, is his main requirement. He needs to compose, not to decompose.

What are the implications of this conclusion? Surely it means that we need and must have a rationalization of grammar and of grammatical terminology. It means a scrapping of an obsolete conception of the subject, a conception based on the classical tradition. It means, too, a scrapping of its terminology, except in so far as it can be adapted to strictly practical requirements. *Practical*—because our pupils need only so much grammar as is required for composing a series of English sentences in accord with usage. *Practical*—because it is instructions for the building of English sentences from their component parts that is required.

"DIRECTIONS FOR USE"

"Grammar" is to be interpreted (for the foreign student) as a set of "Directions for Use"—for use in building up and not for pulling apart. Our pupils need to know not *why* certain words have come to be used in certain ways (that, for example, "ought" was at one time the preterite tense of "owe"), but *how* they are used to-day. We require, that is to say, a grammar that is a catalogue of existent phenomena which have come into being in the course of natural linguistic evolution rather than a collection of problems explainable only by logic. The grammar book that tells our pupils (particularly when they are beginners) things that do not show them concretely and specifically what they need to know and crave to know should have no place either in the school or on the home book-shelf.

The traditional grammars are full of names that are really no more than labels of exhibits in the museums of antiquarian linguistics. The object of research is laws, principles, facts—not concrete things. Entomological research, for instance, does not look merely for insects but for facts about insects. So with linguistic research. We are not looking for grammatical rules or systems for their own sakes. What we want are the facts about the grammatical rules and systems. Which are of practical use to us, or rather to our pupils? Which are mere bones

