

Introduction

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A Guide to Germanic Reference Grammars

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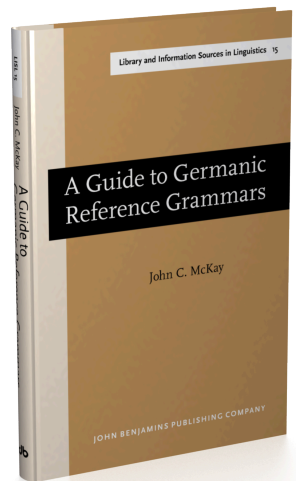
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INTRODUCTION

1. *The Scope of this Guide.* This guide refers to what may be called the best and most comprehensive sources of grammatical information on the major contemporary Germanic languages. It is not a comprehensive bibliography of Germanic grammars. Many works that turn up in the bibliographies have been intentionally excluded because they do not meet the criteria of inclusion on which I have decided to base my choice. Hence, the following sorts of works are NOT, in general, included in this guide:

- 1) textbooks for learning the language,
- 2) grammars published before 1900,
- 3) works which cover only a specific aspect of the grammar, e.g., works on the verbal system,
- 4) purely historical grammars,
- 5) excessively brief surveys of the grammar,
- 6) dialect grammars, and
- 7) the more elementary school grammars.

This is a guide to *reference* grammars and thus does not include textbooks for learning the languages. A guide to these already exists in Walford & Screen (1977). Few of the grammars listed in our guide are included in that work. Although introductory textbooks can be used for reference on basic points, they are organized for learning the language and, therefore, require a quite different order of

presentation from that of a reference grammar. Whereas in the latter one wants material of a similar nature brought together in a single chapter or section, in an introductory text it is often desirable to present a complicated topic little by little to the student and, therefore, to intersperse treatment of that topic with material on other areas of the grammar.¹

The date 1900 as a cut-off point is quite arbitrary and was chosen only as a good round number. The user must be warned that earlier grammars of this century may be inaccurate on the finer points of current usage and, for certain languages, such as Frisian, Norwegian, Swedish, on points of spelling. However, we must reach back to the beginning of the century if we wish to include some of the most important Germanic grammars, which have not yet been superceded, e.g., Noreen for Swedish or Mikkelsen for Danish.

I have excluded purely historical grammars (i.e., descriptions of earlier stages of a language or of its development) since this guide is concerned with the contemporary standard languages. Although many of the grammars I have included contain quite an amount of historical information, their main emphasis is on describing the contemporary language. Some linguists question the relevance of historical facts to the description of a contemporary language. Whether we agree with these linguists or not, we should expect historical information to be clearly distinguished from non-historical information. Certainly, the former is not necessary in a grammar of the contemporary language, since this information is all available in separate historical grammars for each of the Germanic languages. In a small grammar, space devoted to historical facts often means some non-historical aspects are being slighted. For more on the

¹Some introductory textbooks are, however, organized suitably for reference. These have been included in this guide if I have found few other good reference grammars for the language which they describe.

relation between historical (diachronic) and descriptive/structural (synchronic) grammar, see the sections on 'Historical Grammar,' 'Descriptive grammar,' and 'Structuralism' in the *Brief Survey* section.

This guide considers only the *standard* Germanic languages. A standard language has been defined as 'a dialect of a language which is determined in part by rules of grammar which are explicitly known and taught; it is used within a particular country for broadcasting, publishing and communication among speakers of different dialects' (D. T. Langendoen 1969: 155). Another characteristic distinguishing a standard language from other dialects was described by Bohuslav Havránek (1964: 415) as its 'greater functional and stylistic differentiation (*Schichtung*)'. He defined this to mean that a standard language (*Schriftsprache*) must be effective in all the following types of communication: everyday conversation, trade talk, theoretical and scientific discussion, and the language of literary works. I have found the distinction between standard and non-standard languages to be the least arbitrary criterion for deciding which of the many Germanic dialects to cover in this guide. In the end, however, one must make a subjective judgement. It is possible that others would make a different selection from what I have included in this guide. In particular, they might feel that Faroese, Frisian and Yiddish, which I have included, have no more claim to being standard languages than, say, Low German (*Plattdeutsch*) or Swiss German, which I have excluded. I did not include these last two because they do not, in my opinion, enjoy the same degree of cultural independence from their most closely related standard language (German) as do Faroese, Frisian or Yiddish.

2. *For Whom the Guide is Intended.* In preparing this guide, I had three groups of persons particularly in mind: firstly, the linguist who needs reliable information on a Germanic language which is not his specialty, secondly, the student of any major Germanic language

who, for some reason or other, has not received proper bibliographical orientation, and, thirdly, the reference librarian. All of these people want a quick answer to the question 'What are the best grammars of such and such Germanic language?' I have found this question inadequately answered by most of the bibliographies for particular languages available to date. Most bibliographies merely list the grammars without evaluation. Since all types of grammars are included, these lists can be quite overwhelming. The specialists have mostly overlooked the need for a practical, comparative evaluation of the better reference grammars. This may be because reference grammars, with some exceptions, are regarded as mere epitomes of the original findings of more specialized works. With the increasing flux in the boundaries between old academic disciplines, one can no longer expect the person needing detailed information on the grammar of a language to be a student specializing in that language, who is already well oriented in its bibliography and hence knows which books are regarded as standard reference works by people in the trade. In particular, the growth of theoretical linguistics has changed the type of person likely to need a comprehensive reference grammar.

Reference librarians, unless they happen to be students of a language, need better orientation on grammars. Although they are often asked for grammars of a language, the standard guides to reference works do not cover this area. Walford & Screen (1977) is mainly concerned with texts for learning the language and leaves out many of the more important comprehensive grammars. It does not cover English, Frisian, Afrikaans, or Yiddish.

3. *Criteria for Inclusion.* A good reference grammar should be comprehensive, providing detailed coverage of all points of the grammar. It should be organized so that a person can not only refer easily to individual points, but also find a systematic description of larger areas of the grammar. Rules should be formulated explicitly and

succinctly, and the author should possess that perspicacity for grammatical facts which is the sign of a good grammarian. Rules should be generously illustrated by appropriate examples. It is preferable, though not essential, that some of these be from good contemporary authors. There should be bibliographical references to other grammatical works.

Not all the grammars included in this guide satisfy all these requirements, but, in most cases, *comprehensiveness* has been a necessary requirement for inclusion. I should therefore explain in more detail what I mean by 'comprehensiveness.' A good reference grammar should try to cover all aspects of the *grammar*, but not necessarily all aspects of the *language*. I understand grammar to be the system of rules by which meaning is correlated with the speech sounds (or writing system) of a language. The central role in this system is played by the syntax and morphology of the language, with phonology, phonetics and semantics being the interfaces between this central core and sound on the one hand, and meaning on the other, so to speak. Thus, a minimum requirement for inclusion of a work in this guide is that the work either cover syntax or provide a very thorough description of the morphology and phonology of a language. Most of the works included cover both syntax and morphology and there are a number of works only on syntax. A few works cover only morphology and phonology. These are included because they complement those devoted only to syntax and because there has been in the past an approach that treats morphology as the central part of a grammar. Grammars with this approach include a good amount of syntactic information under morphology since they describe the functions of various morphological forms.

Ideally, a grammar should also cover phonetics and phonology, but I have not excluded works which neglect these areas. To do so would have meant excluding a large number of works which everybody recognizes as major reference grammars, e.g., the large English

grammars of Poutsma and Quirk et al. (1973), or the important German grammars of Brinkmann (1971) and Jorgensen (1959-66).

The criteria of comprehensiveness excludes in-depth studies limited to particular areas of syntax and morphology, however good these may be. A good reference grammar should provide a bibliography that refers the reader to the best of these works. I have said that a good reference grammar should cover all aspects of the grammar, but not all aspects of the language. I have excluded books that attempt to cover the latter, unless they are large enough to contain also a good grammar. Introductory surveys of the language which cover history, sociology, geography, etc., in a fairly restricted number of pages have not been included.