

# P

*Principles & Pitfalls of English Grammar*

J. Lachlan Mackenzie

# P

[www.coutinho.nl/principlesandpitfalls](http://www.coutinho.nl/principlesandpitfalls)

Je kunt aan de slag met het online studiemateriaal bij dit boek.

Dit materiaal bestaat uit oefeningen per hoofdstuk en herhalingoefeningen.

© 1997/2014 Coutinho Publishers

Alle rechten voorbehouden. Behoudens de in of krachtens de Auteurswet van 1912 gestelde uitzonderingen mag niets uit deze uitgave worden verveelvoudigd, opgeslagen in een geautomatiseerd gegevensbestand, of openbaar gemaakt, in enige vorm of op enige wijze, hetzij elektronisch, mechanisch, door fotokopieën, opnamen, of op enige andere manier, zonder voorafgaande schriftelijke toestemming van de uitgever.

Voor zover het maken van reprografische verveelvoudigingen uit deze uitgave is toegestaan op grond van artikel 16h Auteurswet 1912 dient men de daarvoor wettelijk verschuldigde vergoedingen te voldoen aan Stichting Reprorecht ([www.reprorecht.nl](http://www.reprorecht.nl)). Voor de reader-regeling kan men zich wenden tot Stichting UvO (Uitgeversorganisatie voor Onderwijslicenties, [www.stichting-uvo.nl](http://www.stichting-uvo.nl)). Voor het gebruik van auteursrechtelijk beschermd materiaal in knipselkranten dient men contact op te nemen met Stichting PRO (Stichting Publicatie- en Reproductierechten Organisatie, [www.stichting-pro.nl](http://www.stichting-pro.nl)).

Eerste druk 1997

Derde, herziene druk 2014, tweede oplage 2021

Uitgeverij Coutinho

P. O. Box 333

1400 AH Bussum

[info@coutinho.nl](mailto:info@coutinho.nl)

[www.coutinho.nl](http://www.coutinho.nl)

Omslag: Steef Liefthing, Amsterdam

Noot van de uitgever

Wij hebben alle moeite gedaan om rechthebbenden van copyright te achterhalen. Personen of instanties die aanspraak maken op bepaalde rechten, wordt vriendelijk verzocht contact op te nemen met de uitgever.

ISBN 978 90 469 0362 9

NUR 632

# Contents

## PART I First principles

<b>1</b>	<b>Towards a mastery of English grammar</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Some basics</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1	Introduction	17
2.2	The verb	19
2.2.1	Introduction	19
2.2.2	Tense, aspect, voice and mood	19
2.2.3	The verb phrase	21
2.2.4	Auxiliary verbs	21
2.3	Other word classes	24
2.3.1	The noun	24
2.3.2	The pronoun	25
2.3.3	The adjective	26
2.3.4	The adverb	28
2.3.5	The preposition	28
2.4	Conclusion	29
	Exercises	30

## PART II The verb phrase

<b>3</b>	<b>Tense and aspect</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1	Introduction	35
3.2	Tense	35
3.3	The four tense forms	36
3.3.1	Simple present tense	36
3.3.2	Simple past tense	38
3.3.3	Present perfect tense	41
3.3.4	Past perfect tense	43

3.4	Expressing future time	43
3.4.1	<i>will</i> + lexical verb	44
3.4.2	<i>will</i> + <i>be</i> + lexical verb- <i>ing</i>	44
3.4.3	<i>be going to</i> + lexical verb	45
3.4.4	<i>be to</i> + lexical verb	45
3.4.5	The present progressive	45
3.4.6	The simple present	46
3.4.7	<i>be about to</i> + lexical verb	46
3.5	Aspect	46
3.6	Conclusion	50
	Exercises	50
<b>4</b>	<b>Voice</b>	<b>53</b>
4.1	Introduction	53
4.2	The passive voice	53
4.3	Prepositional, phrasal and phrasal-prepositional verbs	55
4.4	Forming the passive	56
4.4.1	The passive verb phrase	56
4.4.2	The actor phrase	57
4.4.3	The undergoer phrase	59
4.5	Two difficulties	60
4.5.1	Verbs with two undergoers	60
4.5.2	The passive and the perfect tense	60
4.6	Alternatives to the passive	61
4.7	Conclusion	62
	Exercises	63
<b>5</b>	<b>Mood and the operator</b>	<b>65</b>
5.1	Introduction	65
5.2	Mood	65
5.2.1	Finiteness	66
5.2.2	The imperative and subjunctive moods	67
5.3	The operator	68
5.4	Tag questions	69
5.5	The dummy operator <i>do</i>	71
5.5.1	Negation	71
5.5.2	Questions	72
5.5.3	Negative questions	73
5.5.4	Emphasis	74
5.5.5	Coding	74
5.6	Conclusion	75
	Exercises	75

<b>6</b>	<b>Modal verbs</b>	<b>77</b>
6.1	Introduction	77
6.2	General description	77
6.2.1	The grammatical characteristics of modals	77
6.2.2	The meanings of modals	79
6.3	<i>Would</i> and <i>zou</i> contrasted	80
6.3.1	Unfulfilled intention	80
6.3.2	Conditionality	81
6.3.3	Rumour	81
6.3.4	Destiny	82
6.3.5	Polite requests	82
6.3.6	Reported speech	82
6.3.7	Past habit	83
6.4	The modals of ability, possibility and permission	83
6.5	The modals of obligation and certainty	86
6.6	Expressing volition	88
6.7	Conclusion	89
	Exercises	90

## **PART III**

### **The noun phrase**

<b>7</b>	<b>The use of articles</b>	<b>95</b>
7.1	Introduction	95
7.2	The definite article	96
7.2.1	Abstract concepts	96
7.2.2	Non-specific plurals	97
7.2.3	Non-referential nouns	97
7.2.4	Place names	98
7.2.5	Quantified noun phrases	98
7.2.6	Time expressions	99
7.2.7	After the verb <i>play</i>	99
7.2.8	Another use of <i>the</i>	100
7.3	The indefinite article	100
7.4	Conclusion	101
	Exercises	102

<b>8</b>	<b>The genitive</b>	103
8.1	Introduction	103
8.2	The spelling of the prenominal genitive	104
8.3	The grammar of the prenominal genitive	105
8.4	Classifying vs specifying genitive	106
8.5	Choosing between the prenominal and the postnominal genitive	106
8.6	The independent genitive	110
8.7	The double genitive	110
8.8	Conclusion	111
	Exercises	112
<b>9</b>	<b>The noun itself</b>	115
9.1	Introduction	115
9.2	Countability	115
9.3	Concord	117
9.3.1	Semantic vs grammatical concord	118
9.3.2	Concord within the noun phrase	119
9.3.3	Concord across the clause	120
9.4	Converting adjectives to nouns	121
9.4.1	Nationalities	122
9.4.2	Permanent personal characteristics	123
9.4.3	Abstractions	124
9.5	Conclusion	124
	Exercises	125
<b>10</b>	<b>The pronoun</b>	127
10.1	Introduction	127
10.2	Personal pronouns	127
10.2.1	Person	128
10.2.2	Number	128
10.2.3	Case	128
10.2.4	Sex	129
10.2.5	Overview	130
10.2.6	The indefinite pronoun <i>one</i>	131
10.2.7	The quasi-pronoun <i>so</i>	131
10.2.8	Possessive determiners	133
10.2.9	Possessive personal pronouns	134
10.3	Reflexive pronouns	134

10.4	Demonstrative pronouns	137
10.4.1	Forms	137
10.4.2	Functions	138
10.5	Indefinite pronouns	139
10.5.1	<i>Each</i>	140
10.5.2	<i>Some</i> and <i>any</i>	141
10.5.3	<i>Either</i> and <i>neither</i>	143
10.5.4	<i>Both</i>	144
10.5.5	<i>One</i>	144
10.6	Interrogative pronouns	145
10.7	The existential pronoun <i>there</i>	146
10.8	Conclusion	148
	Exercises	149

## PART IV

### Enriching and expanding the clause

<b>11</b>	<b>The adverbial</b>	155
11.1	Introduction	155
11.2	The adverb	155
11.2.1	Form	155
11.2.2	Adverbs used inside a phrase	157
11.3	Adjuncts	158
11.3.1	Adjuncts that are adverbs	158
11.3.2	Phrasal and clausal adjuncts	160
11.3.3	The conditional clause	162
11.4	Disjuncts	165
11.5	Conjuncts	166
11.6	Clauses with many adverbials	169
11.7	Conclusion	170
	Exercises	171
<b>12</b>	<b>Building sentences</b>	173
12.1	Introduction	173
12.2	Co-ordination	175
12.2.1	Compound sentences	175
12.2.2	Co-ordination of subordinate clauses	176
12.2.3	Co-ordination of non-clausal elements	176

12.3	Subordination	177
12.3.1	Clausal adjuncts, disjuncts and conjuncts	178
12.3.2	Non-restrictive relative clauses	179
12.4	Embedding	180
12.5	Restrictive relative and appositional clauses	184
12.5.1	Restrictive relative clauses	184
12.5.2	Appositional clauses	187
12.6	Conclusion	188
	Exercises	189
	<b>Key to exercises</b>	191
	<b>Glossary</b>	211
	<b>Index</b>	217



# PART I

## First principles

---

- 1 Towards a mastery of English grammar
- 2 Some basics

# 1

## Towards a mastery of English grammar

The aim of this book is to compare Dutch and English grammar, concentrating on the differences, but also pointing out where the two languages are similar. Speakers of Dutch make mistakes in English grammar for all sorts of reasons. One of these is interference from their native Dutch. What happens is that the habits which come entirely naturally when speaking or writing Dutch are carried over rather directly into English. By making the differences between English and Dutch explicit, this book gives guidance that will help you reduce the number and frequency of such errors. Alongside interference, there is hypercorrection. If you have already had years' experience of learning English, you may suspect everything is different from Dutch. As a result you wrongly avoid any English construction that is reminiscent of a Dutch one. For this reason, the book also points out where these two close relatives in the family of languages are similar in structure.

Another goal is to provide a basic grammatical terminology that is generally consistent with fuller presentations of English grammar such as those mentioned below. Not all grammarians agree about the best analyses and the most appropriate terminology; in this book I have aimed above all to be up-to-date and to avoid controversy. The book is oriented to English grammar, so when writing about Dutch I have not used traditional Dutch grammatical terminology. Instead the terminology is presented in a glossary with Dutch equivalents.

A final goal is to emphasize that English (like Dutch and all other languages) is not monolithic and unchanging but is a flexible instrument that adapts to the situations it is used in. You will therefore come across differences between formal and informal usage, between the spoken and written modes of communication, and between British and American norms (indicated by the abbreviations BrE and AmE respectively). In addition, English is currently used by many more non-native speakers in their daily lives than native speakers. In other words, English has been adopted as a *lingua franca* or a 'bridge language' in conversations or correspondence among people with other first languages. In the Netherlands and Flanders, English as a *lingua franca* is the standard for communication with foreigners in tourism, business, academia

and government; wherever usage deviates from standard English, this is indicated with the abbreviation ELF.

This book is primarily for native speakers of Dutch who have studied English at secondary school and now want to rid their English of the influence of their mother tongue. It is suitable for university students, students attending vocational training, schoolteachers and more generally everyone who needs to use English accurately and effectively in their professional lives. In terms of learning outcomes, the level aimed at corresponds to B2 or C1: the former is defined as “Good grammatical control; occasional ‘slips’ or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect”, and the latter as “Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot, and generally corrected when they occur” (*Common European Framework of Reference*, p. 114, [www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf)).

Although it aims to give a fairly complete overview of the areas of English grammar Dutch advanced learners are known to have difficulties with, a book this size can of course only offer a partial treatment of English grammar. For fuller accounts, consult:

- Aarts, Bas, Sylvia Chalker & Edmund Weiner. 2014. *Oxford Modern English Grammar*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Biber, Douglas, Susan Conrad & Geoffrey Leech. 2002. *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.
- Carter, Ronald & Michael McCarthy. 2006. *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Downing, Angela. 2014. *English Grammar: A University Course*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- Huddleston, Rodney & Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.

This is the third, thoroughly revised edition of a book first published in 1997. In the Netherlands, English has since changed from being one of the major foreign languages to functioning as a second language in an internationalized social environment, part and parcel of everyone’s studies and professional competence. English is heard almost everywhere in Dutch society and hardly feels like a foreign language any more, so it may be hard to relate the contrastive information in this book to your daily experience. The best approach is to take the statements made here and consciously test them against what you read or hear in your environment. Are there counterexamples, are there other ways of seeing the matter, can the generalization be extended to other cases? Be continually on the look-out for unexpected forms of expression. In

this way, you can sharpen your grammatical sensitivity and then return to this book with a critical eye.

I wish to thank various colleagues who looked at the second edition of the book with just such a critical eye and made various suggestions for improvements. Many of their ideas and corrections have made their way into this 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. My thanks go to Bert Weltens, Ton van Brederode and Manon van der Laaken, as well to Gareth O'Neill for the first version of some of the exercises on the website associated with this book.

As you might expect, almost all the examples in this book are grammatically correct. However, it is sometimes necessary to give incorrect examples to warn you against errors. Ungrammatical examples are preceded by a cross (✕); examples of dubious acceptability are marked with a question mark (?) at the beginning; and examples whose grammaticality is contrasted with an ungrammatical alternative are marked with a tick (✓).

Every chapter except this one has exercises, with a key at the back of the book. The additional exercises that you can find on the website associated with this book ([www.coutinho.nl/principlesandpitfalls](http://www.coutinho.nl/principlesandpitfalls)) are designed to ensure that you have understood and assimilated the material and to stimulate you to go beyond the text towards further refinements. The secret to mastering English grammar lies in a combination of understanding and curiosity. As you become increasingly aware of the subtle and often flexible *principles* that determine the form of the English language, you will also become less likely to stumble into the various *pitfalls* that lie in wait for the unwary.

# 2

## Some basics

### 2.1 Introduction

The fact that you are reading this book in English shows that you already have a considerable knowledge of English grammar and of English words. The purpose of *Principles and Pitfalls of English Grammar* is therefore not to teach you English from scratch but rather to give you an understanding of the grammatical principles that underlie your knowledge of English in order to help you express your ideas more accurately. For native speakers and fluent users, grammatical knowledge is almost completely unconscious. When we speak, most of us are like a driver who knows how to steer, change gear and brake but has little idea what actually goes on under the bonnet. Language learners can get a long way just by observing and imitating others, but ultimately it helps to know how the language is put together so that you can identify your weak points and improve.

What does grammatical knowledge involve? The aim of this chapter is to introduce the basics of the answer to this question. One fundamental thing we know is that words, both in English and in Dutch, belong to different categories (called word classes). Each word class plays its own part in putting together a stretch of language. The biggest word classes are verbs, nouns and adjectives. A word that can occur immediately after *I like to*, as in *I like to **make** things rhyme* or *I like to **sleep** with the window open*, belongs to the class of verbs. A noun is a word that can occur immediately after *of the*, as in *inflammation of the **eye*** or *at the mercy of the **storm***. An adjective is a word that can occur either between *the* and a noun or after a form of the verb *be* as in *the **black** cloud* and *that cloud is **black***. Dutch also has verbs, nouns and adjectives, but they are more easily recognizable by their form: Dutch verbs have an ending *-en* or *-n* (*maken*, *gaan*), nouns have a gender (*het oog*, *de storm*) and adjectives also vary in form (*de **zwarte** wolk*, *die wolk is **zwart***). English has a class of words known as adverbs, which are recognizable by their form: almost all of them end in *-ly* (*really*, *beautifully*). The corresponding words in Dutch have no ending. Compare *She sings beautifully* and *Ze zingt mooi*.

All the words we have talked about so far are lexical words. We also have grammatical words. When we send an SMS, we not only abbreviate words and omit punctuation but also leave out lots of grammatical words to save time, space and money. We immediately understand a message like:

Got msg thanks c u 2nite outside theatre 8ish

but we also know that it is incomplete and that if we were writing an e-mail we would probably have written:

*I got your message. Thanks. I'll see you tonight outside the theatre at around eight o'clock.*

The words in italics are all grammatical words. The knowledge that you use when you expand the SMS is grammatical knowledge. You are aware that English grammar requires you to use a small number of these very common words. In the following sentences, the grammatical words have been italicized:

*For each of the last four years they have had to play the men's final at Wimbledon on the third Monday because of rain.*

*She must have been incredibly lucky or I doubt she'd have survived.*

*There is no point in debating anything until we have established the facts.*

The grammatical words in these examples fall into two main groups: (a) those, like *to*, *have* or *must*, which occur around lexical verbs (like *play*, *survive* or *establish*) and (b) those, like *the*, *each*, *of* or *no*, which are associated with lexical nouns (like *final*, *years*, *rain*, *point*). Grammatical words will figure very prominently in this book. Part II (Chapters 3 to 6) will be concerned with the grammatical words associated with verbs and Part III (Chapters 7 to 10) with the grammatical words associated with nouns. Other aspects of grammar will be dealt with in Part IV: Chapter 11 is on the grammar of adverbials and Chapter 12 is on how to build sentences.

The purpose of this chapter is to give you sufficient basic information about the word classes of English to permit you to approach the contrastive study of English and Dutch grammar in Parts II to IV. Section 2.2 is devoted to the verb and all the other word classes are dealt with in Section 2.3.

## 2.2 The verb

### 2.2.1 Introduction

Our knowledge of an English verb includes the fact that it can appear in a number of forms. Most verbs have four forms; the lexical verb **operate**, for example, has the following four:

operate, operates, operated, operating

Others have more. The grammatical verb **be** has the most, with eight forms: *be, am, are, is, was, were, been, being*. Others have fewer: the lexical verb **hit** has the three forms *hit, hits, hitting*, and the grammatical verb **must** has only one: *must*.

Lexical verbs like *operate* and *hit* play an important role in language, identifying what kind of state of affairs we are talking about. Other words group around the lexical verb, for example indicating who operated on whom, or who hit whom. This grouping is called a clause. A sentence can consist of one clause or more. Consider the sentence *Because my plane was delayed, my friend decided to wait at the airport until it landed*, which contains four clauses:

Because my plane was delayed	[Clause 1: lexical verb delay]
my friend decided	[Clause 2: lexical verb decide]
to wait at the airport	[Clause 3: lexical verb wait]
until it landed.	[Clause 4: lexical verb land]

Each clause has a meaning, and the meaning of a sentence is a composite of the meanings of the clauses that make it up. What we will say in this book is that each clause evokes a state of affairs, i.e. some kind of situation in our mental conception of the world. In the preceding example, ‘my plane being delayed’, ‘my friend deciding something’, ‘my friend waiting at the airport’ and ‘the plane landing’ are all states of affairs. The various phenomena involved in these states of affairs (‘my plane’, ‘my friend’, etc.) will be known as participants in the states of affairs.

### 2.2.2 Tense, aspect, voice and mood

The importance of the verb in grammar is reflected in the fact that it is the verb that marks four grammatically vital contrasts, namely tense, aspect, voice and mood.

Tense has to do with how the state of affairs being evoked relates to time:

Today the sun *is shining*.

Yesterday the sun *shone*.

Tomorrow the sun *will shine*.

In general, the present tense form of the verb is used for a current state of affairs, the past tense for a past one, and the present tense of the grammatical verb *will* plus the plain form of the verb to indicate a future one.

Aspect is concerned with how you view the state of affairs you are talking about. If you see it as having limited duration, you use the progressive aspect (which involves adding the *-ing* suffix to the verb); otherwise the simple aspect, signalled by the absence of the *-ing* suffix, is the only possibility:

It *is raining* right now.

[progressive aspect]

It *always rains* at the weekend.

[simple aspect]

If you say *It is raining*, you are talking about a state of affairs that has limited duration since, as we all know, rainfall always takes some time, and that time is preceded and followed by dry periods. If you say *it rains*, you are generalizing: what you have to say applies equally to the past, present or future. In Dutch there is only one form for both purposes (*het regent*).

Voice is a matter of your point of departure in presenting a state of affairs. If you are talking about a state of affairs that involves both an active and a passive participant, for example with the verb **bite** (the biter and the victim respectively), taking the former as the point of departure involves the active voice and taking the latter, the passive voice:

The dog *bit* the man in the leg.

[active voice]

The man *was bitten* in the leg.

[passive voice]

The passive voice adds a different suffix to the verb (*bite* → *bitten*).

Mood, finally, reflects the role that the clause plays in communication. All the example clauses given so far have been in the so-called indicative mood, which is found in statements and questions. The other two moods in English grammar, the imperative mood and the subjunctive mood, are recognizable by their form, which in both cases is always just the plain form of the verb. The imperative mood is used in orders and requests like *Get out of here!* or *Pass the salt please*. The subjunctive mood, once used to express wishes, now only survives in fixed expressions like *God save the Queen* (Dutch *God behoede de Koningin*), *Praise be to the Lord* (Dutch *De Heer zij geloofd*), and, above all in American usage, after sequences comprising a verb of desiring + *that*:



Johnny wisely <i>left</i> the dog alone.	[indicative mood]
<i>Leave</i> that dog alone, Johnny.	[imperative mood]
I insisted that he <i>leave</i> the dog alone.	[subjunctive mood]

### 2.2.3 The verb phrase

A full clause will always contain a verb – at least one, and as many as five:

The detective *observed* the suspect.  
 The detective *was observing* the suspect.  
 The detective *may be observing* the suspect.  
 The detective *may have been observing* the suspect.  
 The suspect *may have been being observed* by the detective.

The totality of verbs in a clause (the italicized parts in the preceding examples) is called the verb phrase. The last and possibly only verb in the sequence is always the lexical verb; all the others are grammatical verbs. In all these examples *observe* is a lexical verb and *may*, *have* and *be* (used twice in the last example) are all grammatical verbs. Grammatical verbs are known as auxiliary verbs or auxiliaries. Auxiliaries occur in a fixed order: the sequence *may have been being* cannot be shuffled around, as you can test for yourself.

### 2.2.4 Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliaries have a number of unusual properties that distinguish them from lexical verbs. They are known as NICE properties (standing for Negation, Initial, Code and Emphasis).

#### Negation

If a clause contains at least one auxiliary verb, then it is negated by placing *not* or *n't* immediately after the first auxiliary verb in the sequence, in this case *has*:

Corporate America *has not been* listening.

However, if there is no auxiliary in the non-negated clause, negation involves inserting a form of the auxiliary verb *do*. A lexical verb like **pay** differs from auxiliaries in that it cannot be negated simply by adding *not*:

- ✗ He paid not his taxes for five years.
- ✓ He didn't pay his taxes for five years.

### Initial

If a clause contains at least one auxiliary verb, then it is questioned by positioning the first auxiliary verb in the initial position of the clause:

Have you been enjoying the Olympics?

Again, if there is no auxiliary in the corresponding statement, a form of the auxiliary verb *do* has to be inserted in the initial position to make a question:

- ✗ Believe you really in horoscopes?
- ✓ Do you really believe in horoscopes?

### Code

If a clause contains at least one auxiliary verb, then you can create a short follow-up clause with a single auxiliary, which is said to code (or 'stand for') the entire preceding verb phrase.

You have been followed, and I have too.

In this sentence *have* in the second clause codes the information *have been followed* from the first clause. Again, if there is no auxiliary in the first clause, the verb is either repeated or coded by a form of the auxiliary verb *do*:

John rides every Saturday and Mary rides every Sunday.  
John rides every Saturday and Mary does every Sunday.

### Emphasis

If you speak emphatically, you can stress the first auxiliary in the verb phrase:

He SHOULD have known better!

If there is no auxiliary verb in the verb phrase of the unemphatic version, then a form of the verb *do* is inserted and stressed:

Harold: I love that girl.  
Mike: Oh, come on!  
Harold: I DO love her, I tell you!

With all four NICE properties, it is always the first auxiliary verb that is involved. This first auxiliary is known as an operator. You will have noticed that it is always the verb *do* that is inserted if an operator is needed; since *do* has no meaning here, just a supportive function, it is known as a dummy operator.

If the context makes it clear which lexical verb is meant, it is possible to have an incomplete verb phrase without a lexical verb. Clauses with an incomplete verb phrase often occur in association with *Yes* or *No*, which are felt to be rather abrupt if they are uttered on their own:

Miriam: Will you come to the cinema with me?

Hilda: Yes, I will. Great idea.

No, thanks, I can't tonight.

The auxiliaries *will* and *can* in Hilda's alternative answers are here coding *will come* and *can come* respectively. (Notice that *n't* is not a verb, and therefore is strictly not part of the verb phrase.)

The NICE properties can be used as the NICE test for distinguishing between lexical verbs, which have no NICE properties and auxiliary verbs, which have all the NICE properties. Two verbs, *be* and *get*, are however a little problematic in this respect.

The verb **be** generally has all the NICE properties and therefore qualifies as an auxiliary verb. Here we see it forming a verb phrase together with the lexical verb **study**. Let us test it for each of the NICE properties:

I was studying in the library.

N: I wasn't studying in the library.

I: Was I studying in the library? Why do you ask?

C: My friends were studying in the library, and I was too.

E: I WAS studying in the library. Where do you think I was?

We see that **be** tests positive for all the NICE properties, as we would expect of an auxiliary. However, what about clauses like the following, where **be** is the only verb and therefore should be a lexical verb? The test reveals that **be** again has all the NICE properties:

She was really sorry.

N: She wasn't really sorry.

I: Was she really sorry?

C: He was really sorry, and she was too.

E: She WAS really sorry, you know.

In these cases, we say that **be** is a copula, and define a copula as a lexical verb that has the grammatical properties of an auxiliary.

The other problematic verb is **get**. In Section 2.2.2 we saw the verb phrase *was bitten* in the passive voice. An alternative to using the verb **be** to form a passive verb phrase, especially in speech, is to use the verb **get**:

He got bitten on the knee by something.

Whereas **be** (as we have seen) always has NICE properties, **get** has none of them:

- N: ✗ He gotn't bitten on the knee.  
✓ He didn't get bitten on the knee.
- I: ✗ Got he bitten on the knee?  
✓ Did he get bitten on the knee?
- C: ✗ I got bitten on the knee, and he got too.  
✓ I got bitten on the knee, and he did too.
- E: ✗ He GOT bitten on the knee, I tell you!  
✓ He DID get bitten on the knee, I tell you!

If a verb like **get** functions like an auxiliary but has the grammatical properties of a lexical verb, we may speak of a lexical auxiliary. Lexical auxiliaries and copulas are clearly exceptions to the neat classification of verbs as either lexical or grammatical.

Chapters 3 to 6 expand the information given here on tense, aspect, voice and mood, contrasting the grammar of the verb in English and Dutch.

## 2.3 Other word classes

### 2.3.1 The noun

Whereas verbs generally identify the state of affairs that is being described by a clause, nouns evoke the participants in that state of affairs. They are lexical words that typically name the people, animals, things and places that occur in the states of affairs we are talking about (e.g. *teacher, dog, desk, station*). Sometimes they name entire states of affairs (e.g. *game, coronation*) or properties of people, things and states of affairs (e.g. *honesty, distance, excitement*). With at most two forms, nouns have less formal variety than verbs. Nouns that name a substance (mass nouns) have only one form and are said to be uncountable, e.g. *cheese, wine, honesty*; all other nouns are said to be countable and have two forms, singular and plural, e.g. *girl/girls, achievement/achievements*.

In English, nouns and the things they evoke are classified for animacy (human or not) and sex (male, female or neutral). This classification does not show up directly in the noun, but it does determine the form of certain grammatical words, specifically pronouns (*he, she, it*) and possessive determiners (*his, her, its*), that are used to refer back to the phenomena in question: