A GUIDE TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE

Peter Harvey, (2008)
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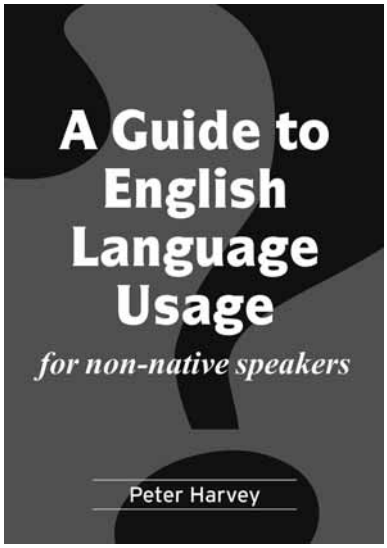

INTRODUCTION

"Not just a reference book explaining the intricacies of English grammar, but also a source of entertainment for the language-lover, covering numerous areas of the culture of the English-speaking world". This is what Dr Brian Mott from the University of Barcelona said about this book, and it was with this idea that I started reading it. To my surprise and delight, it is what Dr Mott says and much more.

A Guide to English Language Usage can be considered to be a reference book for all of us who want to see the use of a word and, rather than focus solely on the meaning of a word or phrase, want to go deeper into its usage.

CONTENTS

This book is dedicated to the study of grammar, usage and phonetics from a practical point of view. It is aimed at non-native speakers who have some doubts and would like to have them solved in a clear and easy manner and not to have to look up, for example, three words in order to understand one meaning, and then have to consult a reference book to look up the usage. *A Guide to English Language Usage* has been written by a teacher and that shows; it is very practical in nature with clear-cut examples that can be easily understood, and it is user-friendly. I imagine students training to become teachers using it, as it really caters for that public, or indeed anybody who might be interested in a grammar question or other kind of language point and would like a quick and clear explanation with concise vocabulary. Furthermore it provides lots of explanations of similar words being used in different contexts with examples, much like a lexicon dictionary.

The table of contents includes the words in alphabetical order so that it is easy to look up what you need. There are detailed grammar articles covering such topics as verb tenses, modal auxiliary verbs, the use of articles, tag questions, etc. Some vocabulary items are included: for example, "above" and "over", and "draw" (on why it seems to mean so many things), and all the various words that mean "hit" to name just a few. There are articles that present cultural material from a language point of view, for example "law", "police", and "Christmas", which further contain the words that are associated with these topics, presented in a coherent manner.

The book includes phonetic transcriptions of the pronunciation of many words using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. So far these are features which can be found in any dictionary, yet *A Guide to English Language Usage* also contains comparisons and clear examples of usage. It includes curious features of interest, such as a list of chemical elements or, under animals, a list with the common word, along with the ones used for the male, female and young of the species, all in one place. So even if you are not looking for something specific, you can get "hooked" by the book.

The layout of each page is in two columns, which can sometimes mean greater difficulty in reading; this is not the case for *A Guide to English Language Usage*, as it is easy to read. It has a dictionary format, but it is much more entertaining than a dictionary. In fact, when you start reading it, you are reminded of Modern English Usage by Fowler; however, in this case, Peter Harvey is dealing with the reality of the foreign learner and what that foreign learner wants to know, which in many cases differs from what a native speaker is looking for in this sort of book. It contains 187,000 words, and thus a wealth of knowledge for the user.

As it has not been conceived as a text book, it does not contain exercises. It should be used as a reference, together with a dictionary. This book has been designed as a help for non-native speakers, the author's own students, in their quest for knowledge or clarification. It explains clearly the meaning and usage of certain words and also some uses that cannot be found in a dictionary although they may be needed by foreign speakers of the language. Sometimes professionals need to locate the usage of a word in an easy way to understand, and this book gives you that explanation.

CONCLUSION

A Guide to English Language Usage is a good reference book and a valuable source of consultation for all of us who are teaching and for advanced students as well. It is worth having in our libraries because you never know when it might help clear up one of those essential doubts we all have at some time in our language use. It is very practical, having being written by a teacher who knows his trade, and is highly recommendable.

Reviewed by
Liliana Russo
lilianarusso@gmail.com

Liliana Russo is a freelance teacher and teacher trainer. She has over 20 years' experience as an EFL teacher and teacher trainer. She holds a Master's in teaching English Through Literature from Universidad de Alcalá, where she is currently co-teaching a Module of Materials Development in the Master's programme.