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**Book Review**

**Krasimir Kabakčiev**  
**AN ENGLISH GRAMMAR:**  
**MAIN STUMBLING BLOCKS**  
**FOR BULGARIANS LEARNING ENGLISH**

Stuttgart: Mariana Kabakchiev Verlag, 2017, 592 pages

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1. INTRODUCTION

With this long awaited grammar book Krasimir Kabakčiev puts the results of international linguistic research at the service of language instruction and guides the learner through the labyrinth of linguistic subtleties of English and Bulgarian with care, wisdom and scientific integrity.

This grammar book is not a quick grammar checker or an easy reference book for a student preparing for a placement test. It is not intended for classroom use either but it is hoped that its content will reach the classroom through the teacher. This grammar is innovative in that it draws on vast linguistic research and teaching experience of the author and that the selected grammar points are observed from the point of view of two languages, English and Bulgarian, thus breaking a long tradition of writing English grammars without any cross-linguistic perspective. The two languages are compared and contrasted in a way which facilitates a proper understanding and use of both. The grammar has 592 pages divided into the following six chapters: Word order, The article - general principles, Peculiarities in the use of the article, Tenses, Signalling perfectivity and imperfectivity, and Voice. As the title of the grammar suggests, these are identified as the main stumbling blocks for Bulgarians learning English.

The grammatical category underlying most of the discussions in this grammar book is aspect, and for a good reason. While a speaker of a Slavic language sets the temporal frame for their utterance by selecting the form of a verbal lexeme, a speaker of English builds this frame as the utterance develops and may even switch from one frame to another by bounding (as in *The river flowed over its banks*, cf. the non-bounded *The river flowed*) or unbounding

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(as in *Peter sang a song from time to time*, cf. the bounded *Peter sang a song*) the structures already uttered. Naturally, this switch has important implications for the Slavic equivalents of the English sentences above.

The chapter Word Order focuses around one of the key differences between the two languages. Namely, in English, the word order is more or less fixed; in Bulgarian, thanks to its abundant inflection, every word may take almost any position in a sentence. The author uses formulae to describe word order rules in English in different types of sentences and for different parts of speech. The chapter is comprehensive and covers special rules relating to *be* and *have* in the present indefinite and the past indefinite tense in addition to the general formula for interrogative sentences. There are also rules on end-of-sentence prepositions and numerous word combinations. Notes such as “An English sentence always has a subject” may surprise some English readers, but such reminders are welcome given the number of various errors resulting from interference committed by non-native speakers of English and foreign learners in general.

The chapter The article - general principles begins by the author asking the learner to “try to get to the bottom of the essence” (Kabakčiev 2017: 75). Indeed, as every English teacher knows, the problems in the use of articles go far beyond the standard grammar explanations on what words and phrases to use or not to use the articles with. Grammar sections covering the English article are almost identical at all levels of language learning and rarely expand to include guidance toward a deeper understanding of the article. In the case of Bulgarian, things are maybe even more complicated and not made easier by the fact that Bulgarian too has the definite article.

The author develops the chapter entitled Peculiarities in the use of the article into a number of sub-sections to cover the use of articles for signalling generic notions, nouns signalling boundedness and non-boundedness, other language entities signalling definiteness and indefiniteness, while the sub-section on language entities signalling boundedness introduces one of the major themes of this grammar book - perfectivity and imperfectivity. The author relies mostly on Verkuyl (1972; 1993) and his own work (Kabakčiev 2000) to explain the interplay between arguments in a sentence and the bounding mechanism (cf. Bulatović 2013).

The chapter Tenses introduces the ‘4 by 4’ principle that takes into account four members of the ‘chronology’ domain and four members of the ‘manner of occurrence’ domain to produce sixteen English tenses. The two tense systems are compared and contrasted.

The grammar deals with tense mainly through the prism of compositional aspect. Aspect is addressed at length in chapter five, which also includes a very detailed account of the impact of the verbal lexeme and time adverbials, among other factors, on the overall temporal interpretation of a sentence. The author uses a reasonably pertinent image of an ‘empty bag’ in reference to what ‘meaning’ the past simple tense assigns to situations (actually it assigns none) and provides abundant yet clearly presented examples to prove this impact. The ‘empty bag’ image is specifically employed in the book for the past indefinite tense, but its use may be extended to include all non-progressive tenses in English. The learner is also shown how the Past Progressive is very frequently used to annul the perfectivity of a verb phrase or a whole sentence (e.g. from *The child ate an apple* to *The child was eating an apple*). Slavic learners will understand this very well because it resembles the aspect clearly indicated in the verbal morpheme in their mother tongue.

One of the biggest contributions of this grammar is its treatment of the sequence of tenses rule. The author rightly criticizes the tendency of most modern grammarians to focus almost entirely on the indirect speech context of use and ignore its use in subordinate clauses following the verbs such as *think*, *know*, *realize*, etc. The author also points to the examples of

use that are often regarded as exceptions to the rule. Using the examples *John saw that the guests arrived* and *John knew that the guests arrived*, the author explains that there is no need to apply the rule in the former because seeing and arriving happen simultaneously, while in the latter the knowledge of the arrival arises after the occurrence of the arrival, which is why *John knew that the guests had arrived* sounds more natural. The author proposes that the English sequence of tenses rule be called the ‘backshift mood’.

The chapter Signalling perfectivity and imperfectivity is a very comprehensive and in-depth grammar book analysis of the linguistic mechanisms signalling perfectivity and imperfectivity in English. ‘Signalling’, in contrast to ‘expression’, ‘marking’, ‘designation’, etc., is used to refer to the covert emergence of some linguistic meaning, as in a sentence such as *The tourist visited the castle*, where perfectivity arises (but is not easy to see) as an extremely complex interplay of all the sentence components, in contrast to sentences such as *The tourist visited castles* and *Tourists visited the castle*, which exhibits imperfectivity (slightly easier to see). These three sentences illustrate the essence of the phenomenon of compositional aspect, discovered by Verkuyl initially in 1972 (cf. Verkuyl 1972; 1993). The mechanisms that contribute to the temporal frame are presented in a well-structured way and illustrated with examples in both languages.

The chapter on the category of Voice focuses on its “capability of shifting the position of certain components in the sentence and for the attraction of the hearer’s attention to a certain part (certain parts) of the sentence [...that] enables [...] bringing out many subtle nuances” (Kabakčiev 2017: 495). After explaining the key principles and supporting them with good examples of English and Bulgarian passive sentences, the author again turns to the essence of things, i.e. to the principles of use of the active and the passive voice. The principles are explained by analysing the shift of focus and the change in the resulting meaning of the selected sentence pairs.

It is hoped that before it reaches Slavic learners, this English grammar will reach all English teachers teaching Slavic learners. If it does, they will find reasonable explanations and examples for some of the most difficult aspects of language use not normally found in standard grammars or included in teaching. They can systematically and gradually weave this content into their daily instruction so that over time and with hard work the learner develops a near-native feeling for these intricacies of grammar.

About the author of the grammar: Krasimir Kabakčiev is one of the strongest advocates of the compositional approach to aspect in English. He has published many articles in international peer-reviewed journals, while his *Aspect in English: A “Common-Sense” View of the Interplay between Verbal and Nominal Referents* (Kabakčiev 2000) is a must-read for every linguist who wishes to fully understand this complex grammatical category. Currently, he is retired and very busy writing articles and presenting in conferences across Europe.

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