2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The word ‘grammar’ derives from the Greek ‘gramma’ which means a written symbol; the first grammarians were teachers of writing and reading. In the Middle Ages, to know grammar meant not only to know how to read and write Latin but to possess the powers of a literate man in a largely illiterate society. In modern English, grammar is used in several senses:

Any language has its basic structures. Every language is a complex of patterns developed over a long period of time by the people using it. In the English sentence You can see it, we know you is the subject (here the actor) and it is the object (the thing seen), when you precede a verb and it follows it. Let us see to the French, for example, the sentence would be written, Tu le vois, with the subject first, object second and verb last. The order of the elements, as well as their form, depends on the conventions of the particular language. Every native speaker learns these and a host of other patterns in his language as a child and can understand and use them automatically. These patterns may be called the complete or total grammar of the language; in this sense English grammar is “the English way of saying thinks.” This is an attempt to describe as systematically and objectively as possible the total system of a language. In his method, the grammarian attempt to be scientific: he observes the language as it is in an effort to discover its underlying system but without trying to guide the language habits of speakers and writers. Since a language is extensive, complex, varied, and elusive, a particular grammar will never be complete but will depend on the limitations the grammarian has set himself and those imposed on him; he will
usually limit himself to one variety of the language (ordinarily that used by the educated because the material is most readily available), and he will be limited by his training (the linguistic philosophy he embraces), the information available to him, and, of course, his individual competence.

When the description of a language covers a considerable period of time, describing the evolution of words and forms and constructions, perhaps explaining present usage in the light of the past, it is called historical or diachronic grammar. When several related languages are compared, as English might be with Latin or German, it is called comparative grammar. When one stage of a language is described, it is called synchronic grammar.

For one variety of the language there will be one basic structure, one underlying system, one grammar in the sense. Every attempt to describe this grammar will be a grammar; in this second sense there may therefore be several grammars. A brief account of the three principal types of these follows:

Though fully aware of the primacy of speech as language, they were able to break away only gradually from the habit of depending on written records for their evidence, especially as they were much concerned—Grimm again, for example—with the history of the language. Nevertheless their achievements have been enormous, and they established the firm foundations of modern linguistics.

This approach, to which Americans have been major contributors, carries through much more rigorously two principles of the classical descriptive grammars: the primacy of speech and the importance of the structural patterns of the language in conveying grammatical meaning. Structural descriptive grammars
therefore begin with the phoneme, go on to the morpheme, and attempt o identify the syntactical devices by which grammatical relations are signalled.

One unfortunate result of prescriptive grammar is that the teaching of Formal English has seemed so unreal to students that, unable to separate the useful from the useless advice, they have paid almost no attention at all to it. If they talked as their textbooks said they should, they would be laughed at; consequently they have usually continued their old habits.

Although the usage recommended in schools will probably always be a little more formal than that being practiced by actual writers, school grammar is now gradually getting away from traditional prescriptive grammar anti is coming closer to the actual usage of the educated as presented in the descriptive grammars.

Many people are occasionally oppressed by a feeling of inadequacy in their use of English. They believe that all their deficiencies, real or imagined, in vocabulary, effective expression, spelling, usage, and punctuation would be removed if they studied “grammar” conscientiously. This is back of the demand for “More grammar!” in the schools. This demand is really based on a desire for more varied and more acceptable usage, “good English”. The best remedy is wide listening and reading and regular practice in using language effectively. Grammatical terms play a useful but subordinate part in summarizing and describing the facts of the current language, but they are not themselves the remedy.
When you use grammar in speaking or writing, you should be aware of its various meanings and varied uses, and if necessary indicate the sense in which you are using it. In this book the term is restricted to the first two senses described in this article, the exact meaning being shown by the context.

The terms used in grammar deserve a comment also. The analysis of language is a discipline more than two thousand years old, going back in Western culture to the philosophers and rhetoricians of ancient Greece. The terminology devised by the Greeks was used with little modification until modern linguistics made its inadequacy for the description of other languages apparent. Some of the old terms have been kept and given more restricted or more precise definition and new terms have been introduced. Some grammatical and linguistic terms are still not standardized, but by making their reference clear we can and must use them in discussing language.

Many people steadfastly refuse to learn the technical terms of grammar. Students who gaily toss about schizophrenic, marginal utility, Hanseatic League, dicotyledonous, or trinitrotoluene will not learn the pronunciation and meaning of predicative, metonymy, or even apostrophe or agreement, and some teachers of the subject try to work without naming exactly what they are talking about. Many of the words are a bit difficult—Greek or Latin names that have been taken into the language—but they are not nearly so difficult as the vocabulary of psychology or chemistry. This book uses a good many of these terms, without apology, though when there is a choice of name the simpler and more suggestive has usually been taken. It is only good sense to gain control of the words that name
common facts of usage and style, words which are an essential part of the English vocabulary of educated people.

In English many groups of two or more words (that is, phrases) function like single words. Often the division of the elements into separate words in print is quite arbitrary. High school is not the noun school modified by the adjective high so much as a noun in its own right just as highway is. But established practice is to spell the first as two words, the second as one. Many of our verbs are made up of a verb plus an adverb: close up, hold off, look into the verb, adverb combinations; many prepositions are phrases: according to, in opposition to.