

## **The Discipline where Time Stood Still: Stagnation in the Study of English Grammar, and what We can Do about It**

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Academic disciplines sometimes cease to develop. They may grind to a halt because of a lack of interesting problems, or access to data, or qualified personnel, or public support, or useful applications. But it is rare for a discipline to atrophy despite an abundance of intriguing research problems, masses of cheaply accessible material, numerous keenly engaged experts, abundant public concern, and widely recognized practical and pedagogical importance. Yet somehow English grammar, as presented in most pedagogical works (and presupposed by all published dictionaries), has stagnated not just for decades but for two centuries. Inaccurate analyses and mistaken claims have been uncritically handed down in ever-weakened form to new generations as if they were sacred truths. The teaching of grammar has ossified, with books from the mid-19th century still in print and treated as standard, or fallen away altogether. Change is bitterly resisted. Informed criticism of the tradition is often treated, bizarrely, as an attack on educational standards. And although modern theoretical linguistics has contributed enormously to the understanding of syntax by specialists, it has had no impact at all on what gets taught in schools or described in handbooks for the general public. I document these claims, discuss how and why the situation developed, and point to more hopeful future prospects.