

A PRACTICAL BULGARIAN GRAMMAR

FOR
ENGLISH
SPEAKERS

*A comprehensive guide
to Bulgarian grammar and usage.
Clear explanations, real-life examples
and varied exercises.*

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FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS**

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE BOOK

The *Practical Bulgarian Grammar for English Speakers* is a grammar book intended to serve as a textbook and reference manual for all learners of Bulgarian at all learning levels. If you are at the very start of a Bulgarian language course and you need more information about the basic grammar rules, or you already speak the language but you are baffled by construction that you hear in spoken Bulgarian and were not explained in your basic course, this book will give you more knowledge about how the language really works. If you study or teach Bulgarian or other Slavic languages at university and you need another view on grammar; or you are just a language enthusiast, this book will reveal for you some details about Bulgarian grammar that you are not likely to learn in standard textbooks.

Method

The method used in this book differs from most standard grammars. We have abandoned the systematic rendering used in most linguistic studies where the three main levels of organization in language - sound, word and sentence - are treated separately in the disciplines of phonetics, morphology and syntax; and where different grammatical categories are strictly divided and explained as independent ideas. Instead, we have tried to group them according to their **function** in the language, e.g. describing people and things, talking about the future, relating past events, etc. So here, you won't find the well-known pattern of nouns, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, verbs and particles treated separately in different chapters but a conglomerate of different grammatical notions combined together to serve concrete purposes of communication.

For example, in the Possession unit you will learn not only the possessive pronouns but also all verbs, prepositions, object pronouns and adjectives that are used in Bulgarian to tell what belongs to whom. In the Giving Commands unit, you'll find information not only about the imperative mood, but also about all other constructions you can use to tell or induce somebody to do something.

Structure

The *Practical Bulgarian Grammar for English Speakers* consists of 15 main units and a reference part at the end.

Unit 1 is a little different from all other units. This is an introduction to the Bulgarian writing and sound system. It contains explanations about the most important pronunciation rules and the phonetic patterns of the language. The unit is divided into three main parts that correspond to different levels of knowledge. The basic section, **Bulgarian Alphabet**, will give you enough information about Bulgarian letters and their formal sound equivalents. This should be enough for you to be able to read the words and examples in this book and be understood when speaking Bulgarian. With the **Bulgarian Sound System** section, you will be able to refine your pronunciation and try to sound more like a native Bulgarian. In the **Spelling Rules and Phonetic Laws** section, you'll learn the main orthography principles of Bulgarian that will help you to write correctly, and some patterns of sound mutation in different word forms.

If you are at the very beginning of your learning, you don't need to read all information. Just try to learn the Bulgarian alphabet and the basic pronunciation rules and go ahead.

If you already have some knowledge of Bulgarian, it can be a good idea to refine your knowledge about pronunciation by reading more about the Bulgarian sounds.

And if you want to become an expert and write correctly in Bulgarian, you'll need to look at the last section.

Units 2 through 14 follow more or less the same pattern. At the very beginning of the unit you will find what functional and grammatical points you are supposed to learn. For example, in Unit 3 you will learn how to talk about definite things, how to describe them and how to compare their characteristics; to fulfill these functional tasks, you'll need to know the demonstrative pronouns, the definite article, adjectives and their degrees of comparison, as well as some prepositions and suffixes to form new adjectives.

In the **Introduction** to each unit you will find some of the main points related to its main subject but not necessarily explained again further in the unit. For example, in Unit 1 you will learn about the most common greetings in Bulgarian but this information can be found only in the Introduction.

Further on, each unit is divided into three main sections: **Basics**, **Fine Tuning** and **Language Expert**. Evidently, the information in the first section is more basic; the second one gives you advanced knowledge about the subject; and in the last section additional information is included that can be important if you want to upgrade your basic language skills. For example, in Unit 6 you will learn basic information about the verb and the present tense in the first section; about reflexive verbs and negative statements in the second; and about different nuances when asking questions in the third. There are up to four **Exercises** after the Basics and Fine Tuning sections in each unit that will help you to refine further your knowledge. The **Answers** are given at the end of the same unit as it is much easier to check them than if they were at the end of the book.

The Did You Know sections contain curious facts about differences between the English and the Bulgarian mode of speech or about grammatical mistakes that Bulgarians make so often in the spoken language that they have become a rule. **References** throughout the book, like (*see 12.4*), denote the number of the unit and the number of the section.

This structure of the units is designed so that you will learn something new in every section, even in the exercises and the answers. You can read them all successively or decide what is important to know and concentrate only on this information. No matter how you use the book, the most important thing is to make the best of it.

Unit 15 is a bit different, too. It does not concern the grammar, strictly speaking, but contains information about the history of the Bulgarian language and script, the place of Bulgarian in the system of world languages, its dialects and styles, and the problems of using a different alphabet in a Latin-dominated world. So, there is nothing to learn here, but only interesting facts that an enthusiastic learner of Bulgarian may want to know.

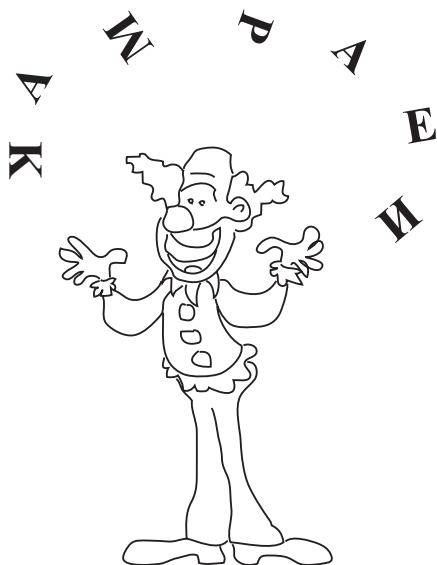
At the end of the book, there are several **Tables** of the most important plural nouns, verb forms and prepositions - information that needs to be rendered in a more systematic way. And lastly, the **Thematic Index** will help you find your way if you know exactly which topic you need to read. If you need a more systematic approach, you can look at the **Systematic index** at the beginning of the book.

IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND GRAMMAR

Grammar is a science of its own, having lots of terms that are not always clear to ordinary people. If you find it difficult to understand those terms, try to read this section and maybe things will get a little easier.

The smallest building blocks of speech are the **sounds** that are produced by the vocal apparatus of the speaker. In writing, sounds are represented by letters but one letter does not always represent one sound or vice versa.

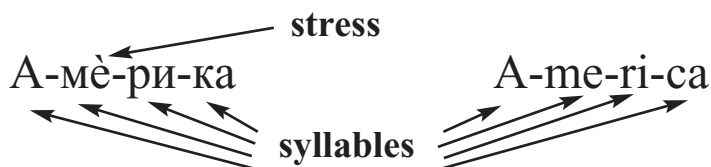
Depending on how much voice you use to articulate them, sounds can be **vowels** (more voice; see 1.2) or **consonants** (less voice; see 1.3). There are sounds that resemble both vowels and consonants and they are called semi-vowels. Their combinations with the real vowels are called **diphthongs**.



But sounds are just a meaningless juggling if they are not combined in **words**. And words represent notions.

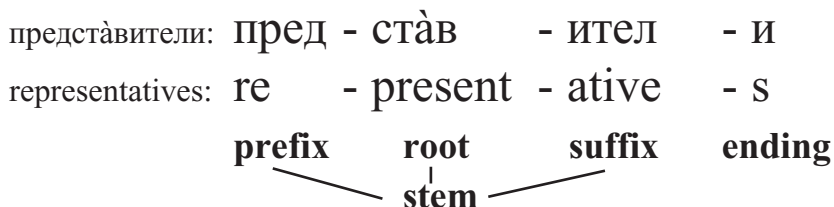


A word can be divided into groups of sounds called **syllables**. One of these syllables is usually pronounced more forcefully and it is said that it is stressed, i.e. it bears a **stress**. In Bulgarian, as in English, syllables always contain one vowel sound and may or may not contain one or more consonants. The stress in Bulgarian isn't usually marked in writing but in textbooks and dictionaries it may be written above the vowel of the stressed syllable:



Functionally, a word contains a part that bears its basic meaning, called a **stem** and may contain an **ending** that determines its grammatical form. Endings don't change the meaning of the word but only its form in terms of gender, number, person, tense, etc.

The stem, on the other hand, consists of a **root**, which can be common for a broader group of words and has a more general meaning, and can contain **prefixes** and/or **suffixes**, which are used to form new words.



Types of words

Depending on the notions they represent, words are grouped into 11 categories:

Nouns are words that refer to persons, animals, things, places, feelings, abstract notions, etc. For example: *doctor, cow, table, town, love, death...*

Articles are little words that show whether you are talking about a definite thing or not. In English these are *a/an* and *the*.

Adjectives refer to real or abstract characteristics of the things represented by nouns. For example: *big, white, angry, nice*, etc.

Pronouns are little words that are used instead of a noun or and adjective to avoid repeating the same word many times. For example: *she, yours, all, nobody, each*, etc.

Numerals refer to numbers. For example: *twenty, fifth*, etc.

Verbs refer to actions, processes and state. Along with nouns, these are the most important words in language because they make it possible to form sentences (see below). For example: *to go, swimming, taught*, etc.

Adverbs are words that show where, when, how and why something is done. For example: *slowly, later, there*, etc.

Prepositions show spatial, temporal or causal relationships between nouns and pronouns. For example: *into, for, without*, etc.

Conjunctions are link words that are used to make the speech smoother; they link other words in more complex sentences. For example: *and, or, because, though*, etc.

Particles are function words that are used to make different grammatical forms. For example: *to* in English infinitives or *not* in negative forms.

Interjections are words that are used to show emotions without the need to make complex statements. For example: *oh!, wow!, damn!*, etc.

Different types of words have different grammatical categories. In Bulgarian, nouns, adjectives and pronouns can have **number, gender** and **case**. Adjectives and adverbs have **degrees of comparison**. Nouns and adjectives have **definite forms**. And verbs, that are richest in grammar forms, have number, person, **tense, mood, voice** and **aspect**. All these grammar forms will be explained in the respective sections of the book.

The sentence

The words alone are enough to express some simple ideas if you are a two-year-old child but they cannot help you much if you want to say something more complex. For this, they are combined in **sentences**.

The central part in a sentence is almost always a **verb**, which, in this case, is called also the **predicate**. It refers to the action, state or process you are talking about.

If something is done, there is usually a doer, and in the sentence the word that denotes the doer (noun or pronoun) is called **subject**.

So, the simplest sentence usually contains a subject and a verb.

More over, you may want to say whom the action is performed on, or who is affected by it. This can be also a noun or a pronoun and in the sentence such words are called **objects**.

Well, subjects and objects can have different characteristics and the words referring to these characteristics (adjectives, numerals or pronouns) are called **attributes** or **determiners**.

And, finally, you may want to say where, when, why or how the action is performed. To do this, you have to use **adverbial phrases** that can be simple adverbs or contain other words like nouns, prepositions, etc.

But sentences are not always so simple! You can replace each part of the sentence not by a single word but by a whole phrase containing a verb, a subject, objects, etc. These semi-independent phrases, that can be used as sentences on their own, are called **clauses**. A sentence consisting of two or more clauses is a **complex sentence**.

Complicated? Well, if you read about all of it at once, it's for certain. But if you study little by little without taking up too much information, you will master the main grammatical rules before you realize it.

So, let's begin!

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